

Nominalization: turning a verb or an adjective into a noun

A "nominalized" sentence is one in which abstract nouns perform most of the work. Instead of boring your readers with with a lot of abstract nouns (such as those formed by a verb root + "-tion"), revise your sentences in order to **make your verbs do the work**.

Nominalized Phrase	Concise Revision
gave a report	reported
made a decision	decided
offered a suggestion	suggested
issued an announcement	announced
served as a catalyst	catalyzed
resulted in an increase	increased
led to the destruction of	destroyed

Sometimes you need to find a stronger, more specific verb to revise nominalizations.

conducted a careful examination of	scrutinized
caused considerable confusion for	baffled
resulted in significant delay of	paralyzed
caused a drop in the morale of	demoralized

Here are a few verbs, followed by common nominalizations.

discover -> discovery	careless -> carelessness
move -> movement	difficult -> difficulty
react -> reaction	different -> difference
fail -> failure	applicable -> applicability
refuse -> refusal	intense -> intensity

(hope-> hope, charge-> charge, result-> result, answer-> answer, etc.)

Common Nominalizations and Revisions:

1. Nominalization follows verb

The police conducted an investigation into the matter.

The police investigated the matter.

2. Nominalization follows 'there is.'

There was considerable erosion of the land from the floods.

The floods | considerably eroded | the land.

3. Nominalization is subject of empty verb.

Our discussion concerned a tax cut.

We discussed a tax cut.

4. Consecutive nominalizations

There was a first a review of the evolution of the dorsal fin.

First, she reviewed the evolution of the dorsal fin.

First, she reviewed how the dorsal fin evolved.

5. Linked nominalizations

Their cessation of hostilities was because of their personnel losses.

They ceased hostilities because they lost personnel.

The instability of the motor housing did not preclude the completion of the field trials.

Even though the motor housing was unstable, the research staff completed the field trials.

Nominalization in and of itself is not necessarily a bad thing.

Some of the nominalizations listed below are crucial terms for academic discourse.

Overusing nominalizations, however, can lead to sentences that are difficult to read.

When you are revising your papers, look at each sentence to determine whether you have used any nominalizations. Ask yourself if you could reword the sentence using the verb or adjective form, instead of the nominalization.

This is especially important in a sentence that is chock-full of nominalizations:

Our expectation was the establishment of new tolerance levels.

The sentence would be much more effective if those nominalizations were revised into verbs or adjectives:

We expected the committee to establish new tolerance levels.

Notice that we left the nominalization "tolerance." Sometimes a nominalization is simply the best word choice for a particular sentence: can you imagine not being allowed to use the words "writing," "discovery," "creativity," or "performance"? When you revise your writing, don't feel that you need to eliminate all nominalizations, but do make sure that the nominalizations you include are the best words for that context.