

Avoiding Nominalization

Ugly things happen when we nominalize. Nominalization occurs when we turn a strong verb into a noun (usually a subject) and plug in a weak verb for the missing strong verb. Terrible things happen to the sentence: passive voice, unnecessary words, loss of agent, *to be* verb as a main verb, and incoherence.

Denominalizing helps us create sentences that are clear, concise, and unified.

Clues to finding nominalization:

- 1) Verbs turned into nouns
- 2) The use of *to be* verbs (am, is, are, was, were) as a main verb
- 3) The use of passive voice
- 4) A missing agent

1) Verbs turned into nouns: Locate verbs that are functioning as nouns and turn them into action words.

Nominalization: The detective conducted an *investigation* of the crime.
Concise Sentence: The detective *investigated* the crime.

2) The use of a *to be* verb (am, is, are, was, were) as a main verb: Replace simple “to be” verbs with more sophisticated verbs.

Nominalization: The hope of the student *is* to earn good grades.
Concise Sentence: The student *hopes* to earn good grades.

3) The use of passive voice (passive voice = to be verb + past participle of a verb): Create the active voice by removing the passive voice.

Example: Passive Voice – The door *was closed* by Jen.
Active Voice – Jen *closed* the door.

Nominalization: There *was flooding* in the building by heavy rains.
Concise Sentence: Heavy rains *flooded* the building.

4) A missing agent: Provide an agent by indicating who or what is doing the action in the sentence.

Nominalization: A ski trip should be planned.
Concise Sentence: *Jim* should plan our ski trip.

Exercises

1. The budget cuts for the Writing Center were the topic of our debate.
2. The intention of the jury is to reach a decision.
3. There is a need for reinforcement of this law.
4. We did a study of the progression of prostate cancer.
5. The delay of the flight was caused by the storm.
6. There was scorching of vegetation by the 2007 fires in Morgan Hill.
7. Our presentation was about a new regulation.
8. It was expected that our collection of data would be quick.
9. The coroner did an examination of the body.
10. A demand must exist for clean energy.

Possible Answers

- 1.** We debated the budget cuts for the Writing Center. **2.** The jury intends to reach a decision. **3.** The city government must reinforce this law. **4.** We studied how prostate cancer progresses. **5.** The storm delayed the flight. **6.** The 2007 fires in Morgan Hill scorched vegetation. **7.** We presented a new regulation. **8.** We expected to collect data quickly. **9.** The coroner examined the body. **10.** We must demand clean energy.