

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, use of *to be* as a main verb, and incoherence. **Denominalizing** helps us create sentences that are clear, concise, and unified.

Clues to Finding Nominalization

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.

Use of "To Be" as a Main Verb

One clue that a word is being nominalized is a form of *to be* (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.

Use of Passive Voice

The passive voice occurs when you use the *to be* verb plus the past participle of a verb. For instance, "The door *was closed* by Jen" is written in the passive voice; you can revise to the active voice by saying, "Jen *closed* the door." Create the active voice by removing the passive voice.

Nominalization: There *was flooding* in the building by heavy rains.

Concise Sentence: Heavy rains *flooded* the building.

A Missing Agent

Provide an agent by indicating who or what is doing the action in the sentence.

Nominalization: Our ski trip should be planned.

Concise Sentence: *Jim* should plan our ski trip.

Activity

Remove nominalization from the following sentences.

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.

Answer Key for Activity

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. Citizens must demand clean energy.