

Nominalization and Clarity: Ensuring the Right Balance in Academic Writing

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Although research would significantly benefit from clear and direct writing, it often becomes crucial to adhere to a certain style of writing, in this case academic style, which warrants some stiffness and formal expression. As a result, writers of academic prose often produce texts that are difficult to navigate and comprehend, being rife with lack of cohesion, logical flow, and focused emphasis. These issues are usually brought about by the lack of a common conscious goal—to make content clear.

Let's review some of the characteristics that make academic prose wordy and complex:

- Emphasis on static verbs
- Emphasis on abstract nouns

*Emphasis on static verbs and emphasis on abstract nouns lead to **nominalization**.*

What is Nominalization?

Nominalization entails the expression of an important action (one that is usually central to the understanding of a sentence) as an abstract noun.

Alternatively,

When a verb or an adjective is used as a noun, a nominalization is created.

Consider the following sentence:

A comparison was made of the effects of inflation on the stock market by Smith and Jones.

It should be noted how the significant action of the sentence, **to compare**, has been expressed as an abstract noun. While a certain degree of embellishment is required in academic writing, it is important to ensure that the use of elevated expressions does not hinder readability and the primary purpose of research (to be practical and relevant).

Thus, to ensure clarity, many stylists recommend using the following method:

Whenever possible, use *agents as subjects* (that is, the performer of the action in the sentence) and *actions* (usually the main action) as verbs.

Nominalized sentences tend to insert much of their information into the subject position, which hinders readability and makes them difficult to understand. They can mask the key verb of a sentence, and hence, we often risk losing important information.

For example,

*The university students **conducted an investigation of the** passive action of the university teaching body.*

The sentence above can be made concise by removing the nominalization and by the decisive use of the action verb **investigated**.

*The university students **investigated** the passive action of the university teaching body.*

Some common nominalizations are as follows:

| Verb | Added ending | Nominalization |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain • appear • careless | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • -tion • -ance • -ness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explanation • appearance • carelessness |

Other kinds of nominalizations are as follows:

| Verb | Nominalization |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • choose • bury • believe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • choice • burial • belief |

However, not all nominalizations are redundant and contribute to making a sentence complex; some nominalizations are in fact *necessary*.

For example, a succinct nominalization can replace expressions such as *the fact that* and make a sentence more concise:

The fact that *the reduced sample size affected the outcome of the study was noted by the panelists.*

vs.

The panelists noted that the reduced sample size had affected the outcome of the study.

Further, some nominalizations stand for ideas that can only be expressed as nominalizations: **taxation, revolution, hope, amendment**, etc.

With good research comes great responsibility. Choose your method of expression wisely!

For more information on this, please visit the following reference links:

<http://www.groundsforargument.org/drupal/style/actions/basic-principles>

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