Looking for and Fixing Nominalizations

Nominalizations are nouns derived from verbs or adjectives. They tend to mask the action occurring in a sentence and often hide the actor performing the action. Nominalizations often stem from a writer’s attempt to write more concisely, although the result is often writing that is ambiguous and difficult to read.

Not all nominalizations are bad, however. Some serve useful purposes and achieve their intent: they condense complex concepts into single, manageable words and phrases. Learn to spot the difference. Here are some ways to help.

How to Spot a Nominalization

1. Look for words that end in *-tion, -ment, -sion, -ance, -ence, -ness, -ure, -al, -ity* and *-ery*.

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| **Verb/Adjective** | **Nominalization** |
| Implement | Implementation |
| Agree | Agreement |
| Comprehend | Comprehension |
| Perform | Performance |
| Insist | Insistence |
| Careless | Carelessness |
| Expose | Exposure |
| Peruse | Perusal |
| Possible | Possibility |
| Recover | Recovery |

If no other action verb is present, convert the nominalization into its verb form and rewrite:

Nominalization: The analyst’s **comprehension** of the material is limited.

Corrected: The analyst **comprehends** only part of the material.

1. Be aware that some nominalizations have the exact same form as their verb counterparts, such as *hope*, *charge*, *result*, *answer*, *repair*, and *need*. Consider how the word is being used. Often you will find another verb, but one that carries little action:

Nominalization: A **need** **exists** for a faster Internet connection.

Corrected: The office **needs** a faster Internet connection.

1. Look for a nominalization paired with a form of the verb *to* *be.* Often you will find a sentence beginning with *There are/is/was* and no actor. Find or create an actor and make it the subject of the sentence. Then return the nominalization to its verb form.

Nominalization: **There was an investigation** into the matter.

Corrected: The Board of Directors **investigated** the matter.

1. Look for consecutive nominalizations. These sentences are more problematic because only one of the nominalizations can contain the controlling verb. At the very least, turn the first nominalization into a verb.

Nominalization: There was a **determination** into the **possibility** of an audit.

Corrected: The comptroller **determined** that an audit was **possible**.