

## Grammar Worksheets: Excessive Nominalizations

<http://www.grammar-worksheets.com>

In this sheet we discuss, albeit briefly, a problem addressed beautifully by the late Professor Joseph M. Williams, of the University of Chicago. He spent a great portion of his life examining the principles of clear writing. He distilled his teachings into a book, Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., Pearson, 2007. This worksheet owes much to Williams's work.

**Nominalizations:** A sentence may seem unclear to a reader because verbs and adjectives (words that describe nouns) are turned into nouns. In Williams's words, "A noun derived from a verb or adjective has a technical name: nominalization" (Williams, 38).

### Avoid Making Nouns from Verbs

Take a look at the sentences below.

- (a) A **re-examination** of the evidence led prosecutors to a **reconsideration** of the defendant's guilt.
- (b) Prosecutors **re-examined** the evidence and **reconsidered** the defendant's guilt.

Most readers would say that sentence (b) is clearer than (a). The words re-examination and reconsideration are nouns. Generally, words that end in **tion** are nouns. In Williams's terminology, these words are nominalizations.

The verb forms, re-examined and reconsidered, seem clearer to most readers. The following table lists just a very few nominalizations and their corresponding verb forms.

Nominalization	Verb Form
Analysis	Analyze
Belief	Believe
Comparison	Compare
Conclusion	Conclude
Determination	Determine
Failure	Fail
Reaction	React
Suggestion	Suggest

In general, choose the verb form over the nominalization. But be careful. Some nominalizations are useful and necessary. Use them prudently.

### Avoid Making Nouns from Adjectives

The same principle applies with adjectives. Avoid turning an adjective, such as careless, into its corresponding nominalization, carelessness.

- Avoid: His **carelessness** in driving caused a multi-car accident.
- Prefer: His **careless** driving caused a multi-car accident.

Nominalization	Adjective Form
Carelessness	Careless
Difficulty	Difficult
Intensity	Intense

Ken Bresler treats the topic of nominalizations quite well, including useful nominalizations, in his article, "Just Say Know." Take a look. <http://www.clearwriting.com/know.htm>

## Grammar Worksheets: Excessive Nominalizations

**Exercises: Rewrite each sentence. Turn any unnecessary nominalization into its corresponding verb or adjective.**

1. The steering committee raised an objection to the proposed parking garage north of the stadium.

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2. When the faculty senate has made a determination about the desirability of a lecture series, a proposal will be presented to the chancellor. (Hint. Perhaps we have ONE useful nominalization.)

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3. Negligence on the part of hospital workers was the reason for the failure of the kidney machine.

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4. Mercy Hospital made a decision to expand its geriatric facilities.

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5. It was the intention of the screening committee to interview all candidates face to face.

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6. The investor made an incorrect assumption about the volatility of Brazil's emerging economy. (Some information might be missing in the original sentence. Did the investor think that the volatility of Brazil's emerging economy was high or low? How can the meaning be made clearer?)

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7. The parole board did not give an explanation for the early release of such a dangerous inmate.

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8. It is my hope that you apply this material.

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