



Nominalizations

What are nominalizations?

Nominalizations happen when we turn verbs or adjectives into nouns or noun phrases. While nominalizations are helpful in academic writing, where we are supposed to eliminate personal pronouns, they may not be an efficient form of communicating if you are in a business setting. If you are writing a memo to a client, using nominalizations may confuse your clients or be inappropriate.

Speaking and Writing Center [1]: Using nominalizations makes the verb lose its power when it's turned into a noun and makes the sentence weaker. It can also make the sentence too wordy and thus confusing.

How to identify nominalizations:

The main types of nominalizations are ones that take suffixes. Not every example of nominalizations can be covered here, but these are examples of what to look for:

Suffixes more common to verbs	Meaning	Examples (Nominalization → Verb)
-ability	quality or capacity	measurability → measure
-ance	action, process, or state	performance → perform
-ation -ion	process	exploration → explore evaluation → evaluate
-ment	state of being	alignment → align
Suffixes more common to adjectives	Meaning	Examples (Nominalization → Adjective)
-ity	state or condition	mortality → mortal
-ness	state or condition	friendliness → friendly
-ism	doctrine or belief	capitalism → capital
-ence -ency	state or quality	resilience → resilient urgency → urgent

Another way to find both nominalized verbs *and* adjectives would be to look for “of” between two nouns or noun phrases:

Nominalization sentence: The friendliness of the students helped me to feel comfortable.

Without nominalization: The friendly students helped me to feel comfortable.

Speaking and Writing Center [2]: “Friendliness” is the nominalized adjective in this sentence. You can tell that it is a nominalization because it has the suffix -ness and it is connected to “the students” with the word “of.”

Speaking and Writing Center [3]: In this sentence, the word “friendly” replaces “the friendliness of”. This is more direct and clear, while still keeping the meaning of the original sentence.



For finding nominalized *adjectives*, you can also see if the word sounds logical within the phrase “They are ___”. If the phrase does not sound correct, you have most likely used a nominalized adjective instead of the original adjective.

Nominalization sentence: Lexi’s schedule has a lot of flexibility.

Without nominalization: Lexi’s schedule is flexible.

- “They are flexible” makes sense, but “they are flexibility” does not.

Speaking and Writing Center [4]: Note that changing the nominalized removed the “of” in the sentence.

Rewriting nominalizations

Below are examples of how to rewrite sentences from ones with *nominalized* verbs (noun/noun phrase) to ones with fixed corresponding verbs:

With Nominalization: An analysis of the text revealed a decrease in the character’s empathy.

Without Nominalization: I analyzed the text, which showed the character’s empathy had decreased.

Speaking and Writing Center [5]: “An analysis of the text” is a nominalization because the root verb “analyzed” has been turned into a noun phrase, with analysis being the noun.

With Nominalization: There was an introduction of the CEO to employees that had an achievement in more sales per week.

Without Nominalization: The CEO was introduced to employees who had achieved more sales per week.

Speaking and Writing Center [6]: Note that once the nominalization is changed, the underlined noun “an analysis” became a verb: “analyzed”. Similarly, the noun “a decrease” became the verb “had decreased”.

Speaking and Writing Center [7]: This sentence is wordy, which can confuse your audience or cause them to tune out! Rewriting the sentence to use the original verb form of the nominalization makes the sentence more direct and the meaning more clear.

Below are examples of how to rewrite sentences from ones with *nominalized* adjectives to ones with fixed corresponding adjectives.

With Nominalization: Dr. Smith’s syllabus is useful because of the clarity of its calendar.

Without Nominalization: Dr. Smith’s syllabus is useful because its calendar is very clear.

Speaking and Writing Center [8]: As discussed above, when the nominalized adjective is rewritten, the word “of” is removed. The sentence is also more clear and efficient.

With Nominalization: Perfecting the appropriateness of workplace clothing is a task of difficulty for some.

Without Nominalization: Perfecting appropriate workplace clothing is a difficult task for some.

Speaking and Writing Center [9]: Note that once a nominalized adjective is fixed, the phrase becomes easier to read and understand.

With Nominalization: The exclusivity of the VIP Club allowed for the happiness of patrons.

Without Nominalization: The exclusive VIP Club allowed for happy patrons.

Speaking and Writing Center [10]: Again, note that changing a nominalization into the original verb or an adjective will cut out the word “of”.