

Word for Word

Nouns that should be verbs

Clear communication uses no more words than necessary, and one way to reduce wordiness is to use parts of speech to your advantage. A common pattern in writing that can reduce clarity is using a noun where a verb would convey the same information more concisely—a tendency known as nominalization.¹ For example,

Nerve injury leads to impairment of pain pathways.
Mice were subjected to treatment with the drug or with the control.
We performed a comparison of survival times between groups.



Although grammatically correct, these examples could say the same thing more efficiently and less abstractly by converting *impairment*, *treatment*, and *comparison* into verbs, as follows:

Nerve injury impairs pain pathways.
Mice were treated with the drug or with the control.
We compared survival times between groups.

Converting these nouns into verbs decreases the number of words by eliminating the need for prepositions and verbs associated with these nouns. Furthermore, the main action described in each sentence is now expressed as a verb, an arrangement that feels more natural to readers. Thus, writing that has fewer nominalizations gets to the point more quickly and is more engaging.

Reference

1. Williams JM. *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. 4th ed. New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1994: 43-51.

—Sarah Bronson, ELS

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