Nominalisation[**[Back home](http://www.uefap.com/index.htm)**](http://www.uefap.com/index.htm)

**Features of academic writing**

**Complexity**

**Nominalisation**

Formal written English uses nouns more than verbs. For example, "judgement" rather than "judge", "development" rather than "develop", "admiration" rather than "admire". Changing a verb or other word into a noun is called nominalisation.

Instead of:

This information enables us to formulate precise questions.

we would write:

This information enables the formulation of precise questions.

More examples are:

There appeared to be evidence of differential *treatment* of children.

This is reflected in our *admiration* for people who have made something of their lives, sometimes against great odds, and in our somewhat disappointed *judgment* of those who merely drift through life.

All airfields in the country would be nationalised, and the government would continue with the *development* of new aircraft as recommended by the Brabazon Committee.

Read the following text:

|  |
| --- |
| Reproduction with variation is a major characteristic of life. Without reproduction, life would quickly come to an end. The earliest single-celled organisms reproduced by duplicating their genetic material and then dividing in two. The two resulting daughter cells were identical to each other and to the parent cell, except for mutations that occurred during the process of gene duplication. Such errors, although rare, provided the raw material for biological evolution. The combination of reproduction and errors in the duplication of genetic material results in biological evolution, a change in the genetic composition of a population of organisms over time.  W. K. Purves, D. Sadava, G. H. Orians & H. C. Heller, *Life: The science of biology*, W. H. Freeman, 2004 |

and compare it to:

|  |
| --- |
| All organisms reproduce and sometimes when they reproduce, the children vary. This is an important characteristic of life. If organisms did nor reproduce, life would quickly come to an end. How did the earliest single-celled organisms reproduce? They duplicated their genetic material and then they divided in two. Two daughter cells resulted from this process; they were identical to each other and to the parent cell. But sometimes as the genes duplicated, they changed or mutated. These errors are not very common but they provide the basic material for life to evolve. So when the genetic material duplicates, they reproduce and they make errors. As a result, there is a change in what the genes are composed of. When these processes combine, life evolve. |

The first text is more academic. The second text is longer. It has shorter sentences. It asks question and answers them. All these features are typical of spoken language.

Compare these sentences:

1. Organisms reproduce. This is a major characteristic of life.
2. Reproduction is a major characteristic of life.

In general they mean the same, but sentence 2 is expressed more concisely. It uses the word “reproduction”, whereas sentence 1 uses the word ”reproduce". Here the word “reproduce” is a verb. It would change to “reproduces” if “organisms” changed to “an organism”. “Reproduction” is a noun made from the verb “reproduce”; we call this process nominalisation.

**Exercise**

Complete the table below by finding other nominalisations in the first text above, based on the verbs in the second text.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Verb** | **Nominalisation** |
| reproduce | reproduction |
| vary |  |
| duplicate |  |
| divide |  |
| mutate |  |
| combine |  |

Here are some more verbs that are commonly nominalised. Add more to the table from your own reading.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Verb** | **Nominalisation** |
| reproduce | reproduction |
| adapt | adaptation |
| contract | contraction |
| expand | expansion |
| react | reaction |
| rotate | rotation |
|  |  |
|  |  |

However, not all nominalised words end in “tion” . Examples are:

1. The discovery of this general pattern generated the intermediate disturbance hypothesis.
2. It serves as a template for the synthesis of proteins.
3. The increase occurs because the number of individuals an area can support increases with productivity, and with larger population sizes, species extinction rates are lower. But why should species richness decrease when productivity is still higher?
4. This rise in body temperature inhibits the growth of the invading pathogen. Cytokines may also attract phagocytic cells to the site of injury and initiate a specific response to the pathogen.

Others are: *-ity* ability, similarity, complexity; *-ness* blindness, darkness, preparedness; *-ment* development, encouragement; *-ship* friendship; *-age* mileage; *-ery* robbery, bribery; *-al* arrival; *-ance* assistance, resemblance.

There are also other ways to nominalise:

* Some verbs are also used as nouns: plan, increase, influence, survey.
* Some involve a slight change: sell → sale, choose → choice.
* You can use the "-ing" form of the verb: selling, developing.

Furthermore, you can make nominalisations from adjectives by adding -ness, -ism, or -ity. Add more to the table from your own reading.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Adjective** | **Nominalisation** |
| appropriate | appropriateness |
| active | activism |
| complex | complexity |
| desirable | desirability |
| sceptical | scepticism |
| willing | willingness |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**Nominalisations used in phrases with “of”.**

Nominalisations often function as the head of a [nominal group](http://www.uefap.com/writing/feature/complex_noun.htm). Often associated with nominalisation is the occurrence of prepositional phrases, introduced by *of*:

judgment *of* those

treatment *of* children

development *of* new aircraft

source: <http://www.uefap.net/writing/writing-features/writing-features-complexity/writing-features-complexity-nominalisation>

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