**Working on Nominalizations**

Having a strong subject-verb combination is **the single biggest element** that will help you become a better writer. Several of the lessons in this chapter revolve around this concept and our desire, especially in things like science writing or technical writing, to remove the agent, the person who was doing the action in the sentence, to the detriment of a strong active voice.

Sometimes passive voice is required in a sentence—it’s not like passive voice is wrong—and sometimes nominalizations can be used to great effect. But most often they are in our sentences because we think they make us sound smart, or because we have some kind of idea in our heads of what good academic writing sounds like and we try to approximate it. Let’s learn the difference and take a deeper dive into this element of good writing.

Helen Sword’s [“Beware of Nominalizations (AKA “Zombie Nouns)”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNlkHtMgcPQ) starts our discussion of this topic.  
Then, we’ll try to rewrite these sentences in a more direct style, some as a group and some individually.

In 1—5, both agents and actions are in italics. Rewrite to state the agents as subjects and the actions or conditions as verbs or adjectives.

1. *Our expectation* was to establish new tolerance levels.   
2. *Attempts* were made on the part of the *engineering staff* in regard to an *assessment* of the project.   
3. There were *expectations* by the *governing committee* that *their* report *submission* would meet the deadline.   
4. The *appearance* of the *candidate* before the board was on May 30.   
5. *The governor’s refusal* of the request is a *necessity.*

In sentences 6—10, only the agents are in italics.

6. A *presidential* appeal was made to *the American people* for the conservation of gasoline.   
7. More accurate measurements of the thorium half-life were conducted at that time by *independent investigators.*8. Discussions by the *participants* of the future of the program were conducted amicably.   
9. There was no independent *business-sector analysis* of the cause of the trade deficit.   
10. Agreement as to the need for revisions in the terms of the treaty was reached by *the two sides.*

In 11—15, only the nominalizations are in italics.

11. There was *uneasiness* among management over the survey.   
12. There must be thorough *preparation* of the specimen sections by the laboratory personnel.   
13. The discrepancy in the data demands *checking* by the insurer.   
14. The *rejection* of the application by the dean was unexpected.   
15. The performance by the police of an *investigation* into the affair occurred without delay.

In the next nine items, neither agent nor action is identified. Where necessary, invent agents.

16. There should be no hesitation in regard to saying no.   
17. The same principles of bilateral symmetry received study after the last report.   
18. A solution to the problem of UFOs will never he found by the Air Force.   
19. It is my belief that there should be consultation by the administrators with the student body before changes in rules are made.   
20. Cutbacks in loan availability are mandated as a result of lack of success in the acquisition of federal funding.   
21. A redetermination of their personnel needs is necessary before assistance from local sources can be provided.   
22. With the decline in enrollments in undergraduate and graduate literature courses, there seems to be a growing awareness, among faculty members in the department of English and university administrators, of the importance of the contribution of the writing program and a corresponding disposition toward the recognition and reward of those who provide this valuable service for the students at the University.

If you’re having fun with these, try this one for a real challenge!  
  
23. In regard to your reporting about the effects of your petroleum production facilities on the environment, it is our opinion that despite the Environmental Protection Agency’s retention of its earlier regulations, there has been a modification in its policy. There is a greater emphasis placed on the requirement that companies such as yours provide continuing accurate estimates as to the effect of any new facilities on the environment, if it appears that the amounts of your petroleum products might be considered significant by the EPA. At the present time, however, these adjustments in its approach do not yet seem to require any new studies of these effects. A review of older studies already performed may he sufficient for a determination of their applicability to your present situation.