



Actions

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Suit the action to the word, the word to
the action.

-William Shakespeare, Hamlet, 3.2

Understanding how we express judgments

✓Clear

✓Direct

✓Concise

COMPARE

1. The cause of our schools' failure at teaching basic skills is not understanding the influence of cultural background on learning.

2. Our schools have failed to teach basic skills because they do not understand how culture background influences the way a child learns.

The problem is to understand what is in those two sentences that makes readers feel as they do.

Telling stories about characters and their actions

Principle of clarity

- Make main characters subjects
- Make important actions verbs

COMPARE

1. Once upon a time, as a walk through the woods was taking place on the part of Little Red Riding Hood, the Wolf's jump out from behind a tree occurred, causing her fright.

2. Once upon a time, Little Red Riding Hood was walking through the woods, when the Wolf jumped out from behind a tree and frightened her.

Sentence 2 tells its story more clearly than Sentence 1.


1. Once upon a time, as a walk through the woods was taking place on the part of Little Red Riding Hood, the Wolf's jump out from behind a tree occurred, causing her fright.

x Subjects do not name characters.

x Actions are not expressed in verbs but in abstract nouns.

2. Once upon a time, Little Red Riding Hood **was walking** through the woods, when the Wolf **jumped** out from behind a tree and **frightened** her.

- **Its main characters are subjects of verbs.**
- **Those verbs express specific actions.**



Fairy tales and academic or
professional writing

COMPARE

1. The Federalists' argument in regard to the destabilization of government by popular democracy was based on their belief in the tendency of factions to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

2. The Federalists argued that popular democracy destabilized government because they believed that factions tended to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

1. The Federalists' argument in regard to the destabilization of government by popular democracy was based on their belief in the tendency of factions to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

- x Its characters are not subjects.**
- x Most of the actions are not verbs, but abstract nouns.**
- x Whole subject is too long and complex.**

2. The Federalists argued that popular democracy destabilized government because they believed that factions tended to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

- The characters are subjects.
- The actions are verbs.
- Whole subject are short, specific, and concrete.



Verbs and actions

Its important actions are in verbs.

COMPARE

1. Our lack of data prevented evaluation of UN actions in targeting funds to areas most in need of assistance.

x Use lots of abstract nouns.

2. Because we **lacked** data, we could not **evaluate** whether the UN **had targeted** funds to areas that most **needed assistance**.

- **Its important actions are in verbs.**

Abstract nouns

-tion -ment -ence

verb → nominalization

discover → discovery

resist → resistance

react → reaction

adjective → nominalization

careless → carelessness

different → difference

proficient → proficiency

Abstract nouns

by adding -ing (Gerund)

She flies → her flying

We sang → our singing

some nominalizations and verbs are identical

hope result repair request review

Here is the point:

1. We discussed the problem.
 subject verb object

2. The problem was the topic of our discussion.

subject verb doer action

Diagnosis and revision: Characters and actions

Use the principles of verbs as actions and subjects as characters to explain why your readers judge your prose as they do.

Revision: diagnose-analyze-rewrite

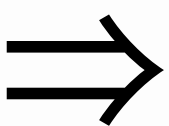
Three steps of revision:

1. Diagnose

Ignoring short introductory phrases, underlined the first seven or eight words in each sentence.

example:

- The outsourcing (of high-tech work) to Asia by corporations means the loss of jobs for many American workers.



- You underlined abstract nouns as simple subjects.

The outsourcing of high-tech work to Asia by corporations means the loss of jobs for many American workers.

- You underlined seven or eight words before getting a verb.

The outsourcing of high-tech work to Asia by corporations **means** the loss of jobs for many American workers.

2. Analyze

Decide who your main characters are, then look for the actions that those characters perform.

- The outsourcing of high-tech work to Asia by **corporations** means the loss of jobs for **many American workers**.

3. Rewrite

If the actions are nominalizations, make them verbs, then make the characters the subjects of those verbs.

Add subordinating conjunctions.

- The outsourcing of high-tech work to Asia by **corporations** means the loss of jobs for **many American workers**.

a. outsourcing→outsource loss→lose

b. corporations outsource American workers lose

c. add subordinating conjunction (because)

→Diagnose

→Analyze

→Rewrite

- ✓ Many middle-class American workers are losing their jobs, because corporations are outsourcing their high-class work to Asia.



Some common patterns

1. The nominalization is the subject of an empty verb such as **be**, **seems**, **has**, etc.:

e.g. The intention of the committee is to audit the records.

a. Change the nominalization to a verb:

intention **→** **intend**

b. Find a character that would be the subject of that verb:

c. Make that character the subject of the new verb:

✓ **The committee intends to audit the records.**

2. The nominalization follows an empty verb:

e.g. The agency conducted an investigation into the matter.

a. Change the nominalization to a verb:

investigation → **investigate**

b. Replace the empty verb with the new verb:

conducted → **investigated**

✓ The agency **investigated** the matter.

3. One nominalization is the subject of an empty verb
and a second nominalization follows it:

e.g. Our loss in sales was a result of their expansion of outlets.

a. Revise the nominaizations into verbs:

loss → **lose** **expansion** → **expand**

b. Identify the characters that would be the subjects of those verbs:

c. Make those characters subjects of those verbs:

we lose

they expand

d. Link the new clauses with a logical connection:

Our **loss in sales**



We **lost sales**

was the result of



because

their expansion of outlets



they **expanded outlets**

- To express simple cause: **because, since, when**
- To express conditional cause: **if, provided that, so long as**
- To contradict expected causes: **though, although, unless**

4. A nominalization follows **there is** or **there are**:

e.g. There is no need for our further study of this problem.

a. Change the nominalization to a verb:

need → **need** **study** → **study**

b. Identify the character that should be the subject of the verb:

There is no need for our further study of this problem.

c. Make that character the subject of the verb:

no need → **we need not** **our study** → **we study**

✓ **We need not study this problem further.**

5. Two or three nominalizations in a row are joined by prepositions:

e.g. We did a review of the evolution of the brain.

a. Turn the first nominalization into a verb:

review → **review**

b. Either leave the second nominalization as it is, or turn it into a verb in a clause beginning with how or why:

evolution of the brain → **how the brain evolved**

✓ First, we **reviewed** the **evolution** of the brain.

✓ First, we **reviewed** how the brain evolved.

Some happy consequences

When you consistently rely on verbs to
express key actions



1.CONCRETE

- Sentences will have concrete subjects and verbs.

Compare:

There was an affirmative **decision** for **expansion**.

✓ The Director **decided** to **expand** the program.

2. CONCISE

a, the or prepositions such as of, by and in
→ verbs and conjunctions

Compare:

A **revision** of the program will result in **increases** in our **efficiency** in the **servicing** of clients.

✓ If we **revise** the program, we **can serve** clients more **efficiently**.

3. THE LOGIC OF SENTENCES IS CLEARER

prepositions and phrases such as of, by, and on the part of

→ Use verbs link clauses with conjunctions such as because, although, and if

Compare:

Our more effective presentation of our study resulted in our success, despite an earlier start by others.

✓ **Although** others started earlier, we succeeded **because** we presented our study more effectively.

4. MORE COHERENT

(Nominalizations let you distort the sequence of actions.)

Compare:

Decisions⁴ in regard to administration⁵ of medication despite inability² of an irrational patient appearing¹ in a Trauma Center to provide legal consent³ rest with the attending physician alone.

- ✓ When a patient appears¹ in a Trauma Center and behaves² so irrationally that he cannot legally consent³ to treatment, only the attending physician can decide⁴ whether to medicate⁵ him.



A common problem solved

- We all read into our own writing what we want readers to get out of it.
- The quickest way is to underline the first seven or eight words of every sentence.
- A character as a **subject** and a **verb** as a specific action.



A qualification: Useful nominalization

“In fact, you can’t write well without them”.

1. A nominalization that is a short subject that refers to a previous sentence:

- ✓ **These arguments** all depend on a single unproven claim.
- ✓ **This decision** can lead to positive outcomes.

2. A short nominalization that replaces an awkward
The fact that:

The fact that she **admitted** guilt impressed me.

✓ Her admission of guilt impressed me.

✓ She **impressed** me when she **admitted** her guilt..

3. A nominalization that names what would be the object of the verb:

I accepted what she **requested** 【that is, She requested something】 .

✓ I accepted her **request**.

Her **request** for **assistance** came after the deadline.

✓ She **requested assistance** after the deadline.


4. A virtual character

- ✓ Few problems have so divided us as **abortion on demand**.
- ✓ The Equal Rights **Amendment** was an issue in past **elections**.
- ✓ **Taxation** without **representation** did not spark the American **Revolution**.

- Expressing common ideas from those you can revise into verbs:

There is a **demand** for a **repeal** of the **inheritance** tax.

✓ We **demand** that Congress **repeal** the **inheritance** tax.



Clarity, not simplemindedness

Summing up

Make main characters the subjects of your verbs,
make those characters' important actions your verbs.

1. Express actions in verbs :

The ~~intention~~ of the committee is improvement of morale.

✓ The committee intends to improve morale.

2. Make the subjects of those verbs the characters associated with those actions:

A ~~decision~~ by the dean in regard to ~~the funding~~ of the program by the department is necessary for adequate staff ~~preparation~~.

✓ *The staff can prepare adequately, only after the dean decides whether the department will fund the program.*

3. Don't revise nominalizations when:

a. they refer to a previous sentence:

✓ **These arguments** all depend on a single unproven claim.

b. they replace an awkward The fact that:

The fact that [she strenuously objected]impressed me.

✓ **Her strenuous objections** impressed me.



c. they name what would be the object of a verb:

I do not know^(v) what she intends.

✓ I do not know **her intentions**.

d. they name a concept so familiar to your readers that it is a virtual character:

✓ Few people have so divided us as **abortion on demand**.

✓ The Equal Rights **Amendment** was an issue in past **elections**.

Glossary

- Action
- Adjective
- Clause
- Gerund
- Simple subject
- Whole subject

Clause:

She left / that they leave / if she left / why he is leaving

for them to **go** / her **having gone**

x: the verbs cannot be made past tense

x: they don't agree in number with the putative subject

Gerund:

When she **left** we were happy. → Her **leaving** made us happy.


Simple subject & Whole subject:

【The books that are required reading】 are listed.
simple subject whole subject

The ability of the city to manage education is an accepted fact.

Q: What is an accepted fact?

A: The ability of the city to manage education. (whole subject)



Thanks for your attention