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Nominalization, Ellipsis, and Substitution

20.1 Nominalization

Nominalization turns verbs and adjectives into nouns: *decide* → *decision*, *grow* → *growth*, *accurate* → *accuracy*, *fail* → *failure*. It is the engine of abstract, academic prose.

20.1.1 Why writers nominalize

- To make a process the *topic* of discussion: *The company expanded rapidly.* ***This expansion*** *created new problems.*
- To compress a clause into a phrase: *Because the government failed to act, prices rose* → ***The government's failure to act*** *drove up prices.*
- To sound impersonal and objective: ***An analysis*** *of the samples* ***was undertaken****.*

20.1.2 Common nominalizing suffixes

-tion/-sion	*inform* → *information*	*-ment*	*develop* → *development*
-ance/-ence	*resist* → *resistance*	*-al*	*arrive* → *arrival*
-ity	*scarce* → *scarcity*	*-ness*	*aware* → *awareness*
-ure	*fail* → *failure*	*-th*	*grow* → *growth*
zero suffix	*increase, change, use*	*-ing*	*the signing of the treaty*

Style & Register

Nominalization is a tool, not a virtue. Overuse produces "zombie nouns" and buries the action: ✗ *The implementation of the reduction of costs was achieved by the management.* → ✓ *Management cut costs.* Rule of thumb: nominalize to link back to something already said, or to name a concept; otherwise, let verbs be verbs.

20.2 Ellipsis

Ellipsis omits words recoverable from context. Handled well, it is the difference between natural and robotic English.

20.2.1 Ellipsis in coordination

- Shared subject: *She came in, (she) sat down, and (she) opened her laptop.*
- Shared auxiliary: *He has apologized and (has) promised to pay.*
- Shared verb (gapping): *Anna ordered fish; Marco, (ordered) steak.*
- Shared elements from the second conjunct (right-node raising): *She admires, but her brother distrusts, all politicians.*

20.2.2 Ellipsis after auxiliaries (stripping the verb phrase)

The auxiliary stands for the whole verb phrase:

- *"Will you come?" "I might (come)."*
- *She can't swim, but her sister **can**.*
- *They said they would call, and they **did**.*
- With *to* (infinitival ellipsis): *"Join us!" "I'd love **to**." He didn't want to move, but he had **to**.*

20.2.3 Situational ellipsis (informal)

Speech drops predictable openings: *(Do you) Want some coffee? (I) Hope you're well. (It) Sounds great. (Are you) Ready?* Recognize it; avoid it in formal writing.

20.3 Substitution

Instead of omitting, English can replace with a pro-form:

- *one/ones* for countable nouns: *I'll take the blue **one**. These shoes are worn out — I need new **ones**.*
- *do so* for verb phrases (formal): *Anyone wishing to object may **do so** in writing.*
- *so/not* after *think, hope, believe, suppose, be afraid*: *"Will it rain?" "I think **so**. / I hope **not**."*
- *so + auxiliary + subject* (addition): *She left early, and **so did I**.* vs. *so + subject + auxiliary* (confirmation): *"You promised!" "**So I did**."*
- *if so / if not*: *The part may be faulty; **if so**, we will replace it.*

Common Error

- ✗ *"Is it far?" "I don't think."* → ✓ *I don't think **so**.*
- ✗ *I asked him to leave, and he did so leave.* → ✓ *. . . and he did (so).*
- Ellipsis must be recoverable and parallel: ✗ *The staff were informed and the manager the reasons.* → ✓ *The staff were informed, and the manager explained the reasons.*

Exercises

Exercise 20.1 Nominalize / denominalize

(a) Rewrite 1–3 with a nominalization; (b) rewrite 4–6 with strong verbs.

1. The committee decided quickly, which surprised everyone.
2. Because demand grew, prices rose.
3. The two sides agreed, which ended the strike.
4. A review of the proposal was conducted by the team.
5. The occurrence of the failure of the pump was at midnight.
6. There was resistance on the part of residents to the demolition of the theatre.

Exercise 20.2 Ellipsis

Cross out every word that can be naturally omitted.

1. She washed the dishes, and then she dried the dishes.
2. I haven't read the report, but I will read the report tonight.

3. He plays tennis, and his wife plays golf.
4. “Are you coming to the party?” “I’d like to come to the party, but I can’t come to the party.”

Exercise 20.3 Substitution

Replace the underlined words with an appropriate pro-form.

1. “Do you think the talks will succeed?” “I hope the talks will succeed.”
2. My old laptop is faster than my new laptop.
3. She promised to review the file, and she reviewed the file.
4. “Has the parcel arrived?” “I’m afraid the parcel has not arrived.”