

## **Week 6: Improving your academic style**

**Task 1: Read the following two pairs of sentences. All the sentences are perfectly correct, but one of them in each pair is a better example of academic writing than the other. Which one, and why?**

1a. Lots of people in today's world think the environment is an important topic, so scientists and researchers spend a lot of time talking about it and how to protect it.

1b. Since environmental concerns are a significant issue in contemporary society, a great deal of scientific discussion is concerned with the environment and its protection.

2a. If we are to protect our environment, we will need to develop new technology.

2b. The protection of the environment is synonymous with the development of new technology.

**Nominalizations** (e.g. '*Environmental concerns*', '*discussion*', '*protection*', '*development*') are encountered far more frequently in academic writing than in any other form of writing. Analysis of texts, however, shows that non-native speaker writers employ significantly fewer nominalizations than first-year native speaker students without formal training in writing, which can make the **non-native speaker text appear less academic**. Henkel (2004, p110) maintains that "using ... nominalizations can make students' texts appear less childish and simple and, ultimately, lead to better grades in mainstream courses".

**Want to make your essays, dissertations, more academic? Then learn to use nominalizations effectively.**

**Nominalization** = forming a noun from other parts of speech, most commonly verbs and adjectives.

**Task 2: How are verbs and adjectives transformed into nouns (nominalization)? Clue: 'nominalization' is a nominalization of 'to nominalize'.**

The most common suffixes used in academic texts, in descending order, are: -tion, -ity, -er, -ness, -ism, -ment, -ant, -ship, -age and -ery.

**Task 3: Convert the following nouns and adjectives into nouns by adding an appropriate suffix. In some cases, there may be more than one possible noun.**

| <b>Verb/Adjective</b> | <b>Noun(s)</b>                     |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| assist                | <i>assistance/assistant/assist</i> |
| accurate              |                                    |
| simple                |                                    |
| govern                |                                    |
| ready                 |                                    |
| solve                 |                                    |
| teach                 |                                    |
| employ                |                                    |
| attend                |                                    |
| fail                  |                                    |
| possible              |                                    |
| export                |                                    |

Nouns with the suffix '*-tion*' and '*-sion*' are particularly prevalent in the academic genre, where the suffix occurs in both frequent and rare words. Some of the most common nouns with '*-tion*' and '*-sion*' are to be found on the next page.

|                      |                     |                     |                   |
|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| <i>action</i>        | <i>direction</i>    | <i>infection</i>    | <i>production</i> |
| <i>addition</i>      | <i>distribution</i> | <i>information</i>  | <i>reaction</i>   |
| <i>application</i>   | <i>education</i>    | <i>instruction</i>  | <i>relation</i>   |
| <i>association</i>   | <i>equation</i>     | <i>cooperation</i>  | <i>situation</i>  |
| <i>communication</i> | <i>examination</i>  | <i>organisation</i> | <i>variation</i>  |
| <i>concentration</i> | <i>formation</i>    | <i>population</i>   |                   |

**Task 4: Rewrite the following sentences replacing the verbs and adjectives (in bold) with nouns. You may find that you need to restructure part, or all, of the sentence. However, you should end up with far more academic-like sentences.**

**Example**

They **discovered** gold and started **producing** jewellery.  
→ *The **discovery** of gold led to the **production** of jewellery.*

1. The committee will **announce** the results in September.
2. The students **failed** their exams and they were very **disappointed**.
3. She **reviewed** the book in the Sunday Times.
4. It is more expensive to **extract** coal from underground mines.
5. Many of the contributors were very **generous**.
6. Crime **increased** last year and the police are **concerned**.
7. In many parts of the world, water is becoming **scarce**.
8. The scientist **admitted** he had falsified his research, which resulted in his **being dismissed**.
9. Many emerging countries believe it is **important** to become **independent**.

**ANY DECENT DICTIONARY SHOULD GIVE YOU THE NOUN EQUIVALENT OF THE VERB OR ADJECTIVE.**

## **Collocation – vocabulary, but worth looking at**

You will have noticed, when constructing sentences in the task above, that certain of the nouns were accompanied by a particular verb. For example:

An **announcement** is **made**  
Something **causes** **disappointment**  
A **review** **appears** in a newspaper  
Something **causes** people **concern**  
People are **affected by** the **scarcity** of something.

These are all examples of **collocation**.

**Definition:** A collocation (**also known as** 'word pairing', 'word partnership', 'set phrase') is made up of two or more words that are commonly used together in English. There are different kinds of collocations in English. Strong collocations are word pairings that invariably co-occur. Good examples of this type of word pairing are combinations with '**make**' and '**do**'. You **make a cup of tea**, but **do your homework**.

It's important to learn strong collocations when learning a new noun. By learning the verbs and adjectives that are commonly used with a noun, you can greatly expand your vocabulary.

A good way to learn these word pairings is to group collocations beginning with a noun. For example, take the noun '*contract*' and create a list of verbs and adjectives with which it can co-occur.

**contract** → nouns: *draw up, sign, negotiate*, etc. adjectives: *valid, one-year, indefinite*, etc.

### **Task 5: Have a go at the following:**

Which of the following verb-noun collocations is correct?

1. Can I \_\_\_\_\_ an appointment to see the doctor today?
  - a. make
  - b. accept
  - c. invite
2. My boss wasn't happy when I refused her \_\_\_\_\_ to dinner.
  - a. booking
  - b. invitation
  - c. arrangement

From a BBC World Service website:

"I usually get confused using adjectives like **heavy, strong, severe, hard**. For example, should it be :

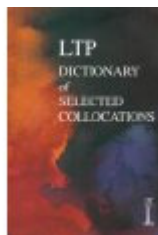
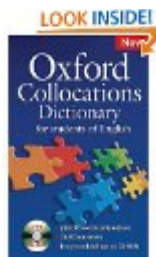
**heavy traffic** or **severe traffic** or  
**heavy / strong / severe wind** or  
**heavy / strong / severe / hard rain** or  
They hit me so **hard/strong...?**"

What do **you** think?

Which of the following adjective-noun collocations is not possible?

- |                   |                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| a) A strong exam  | c) A strong cheese    |
| b) A strong woman | d) A strong cigarette |

There are several dictionaries devoted solely to collocation. For example:



McIntosh, C, Francis, B, Poole, R (Eds). (2009). *Oxford Collocations Dictionary: for students of English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Hill, J.Lewis, M. (1997). *The LTP Dictionary of Selected Collocations*. Thompson Learning.

Ilson, R. Benson, E, and Benson, M. (1999). *Student's Dictionary of Collocations (BBI Collocation)*. Cornelsen ELT)

**Task 6: There are several significant differences between the two texts below, one of the differences being the use of nouns. Underline/Highlight nominalizations in the formal text.**

| Informal text  | Formal text  |
|--|--|
| <p>Because only a few people have most of the money and power in Australia, I conclude that it is not an equal society. Society has an Upper, Middle and Lower class, and I think that most people, when they are born into one class, end up staying in that class for their whole lives. When all three classes are looked at more closely, other things such as the differences between the sexes and people's racial backgrounds also add to the unequal nature of Australian society.</p> | <p>The inequity in the distribution of wealth in Australia is yet another indicator of Australia's lack of egalitarianism. In 1985, 20% of the Australian population owned 72.2% of the wealth, with the top 50% owning 92.1% (Raskall, 1988 p287). Such a significant skew in the distribution of wealth indicates that, at least in terms of economics, there is an established class system in Australia. McGregor (1988) argues that Australian society can be categorised into three levels: the Upper, Middle and Working classes. In addition, it has been shown that most Australians continue to remain in the class into which they were born (McGregor, 1988 p156), despite arguments about the ease of social mobility in Australian society (Fitzpatrick, 1994). The issue of class and its inherent inequity, however, is further compounded by factors such as race and gender within and across these class divisions.</p> |
| <p>Women earn and own less than men. Why is this so?</p>   | <p>The relative disadvantage of women with regard to their earnings and levels of asset ownership indicates that within classes there is further economic inequity based on gender.</p>  |

Source: <http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/academic/3b.html>

**Task 7: Read the informal text again and underline/highlight all the examples of informal language. Then, go back to the formal text and underline/highlight all examples of 'cautious language'. Finally, is there anything else that you can say regarding the informal and formal texts?**

**Task 8: Text rewrite. Rewrite the following text to make it more academic. You will need to do the following:**

- a. Remove the personal**, e.g. *people*, replacing, where appropriate, with passives.
- b. Nominalize**: replace verbs with noun forms, e.g. *solve* → *solution*.
- c. Change more informal language to formal language**, e.g. *admits to know* → *acknowledges*.

If a person admits to know that in the world people are not equal, they next thing to do is to ask why. What are the reasons? People need to explore what causes things to happen and to question the powers that make things like they are for people everywhere. Usually, people expect governments to find solutions to economic problems which cause people to be poor, children to have to work, people to have to work in poor conditions, and people not being paid very much. People think governments are supposed to think about and solve problems about nature and everything that is around people and about how we can move forward in our country.

**Your version**

*If the inequality in the world is acknowledged, the next logical step is to question the reasons behind it...*

### **Grammar and Academic Style: Bibliography/Sources**

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