

Clarity

Joseph M. Williams



“ “ When **we revise** the abstract nouns into verbs expressing actions, when **we make** their actors the subjects of those verbs and rearrange the events into a chronological sequence, **we create** a sentence that we could call ‘clear’ because as we read it, it does not confuse us” (19)

What are nominalizations?

::“a noun derived from a verb or an adjective” (30).

For example,

Verb or Adjective	→	Nominalization
to engage		engagement
to approve	→	approval
different		difference
to intend	→	intention
careless		carelessness
intense	→	intensity

BIG Ideas

1. The ways we talk about style reflect **how we feel** more than latent patterns in what we read.
2. “Clear” sentences usually provide identifiable **characters** and **actions**.
3. When **verbs appear as nouns** (nominalizations), prose becomes gummy with abstract references and excessive prepositional phrases.

“What’s the story here?”

Williams recommends a narrative structure in which clear sentences provide nouns and verbs, or characters and actions. When characters and actions are identifiable, “our readers are likely to feel our prose is clear and direct” (43).