How to Become a Better Writer

Don't Bury the Verb

When writers feel that a clear, direct sentence isn't impressive enough, they try to bulk it out. One of the ways is by changing verbs into corresponding nouns.

Here is an example:

'We validate the data', where the verb *validate* instantly conveys a clear image to the reader, becomes 'we performed a validation on the data'. The compelling verb *validate* is now buried in the abstract noun *validation*, and the sentence requires the addition of a bland, less precise verb, *perform*.

This process of burying the verb in a noun is called 'nominalisation'. While it is not grammatically incorrect, it is cumbersome and abstract – it deadens your writing and tires your reader.

Examples of how to do it:

It is easy to recognise a nominalisation – most words ending in *–ation, -ision, -ment,* or *–al* were once verbs. Whenever possible, simply identify the buried verb in a phrase and use it instead.

Nominalisation	Verb
Arrive at a conclusion	Conclude
Be dependent on	Depend on
Be in agreement with	Agree with
Conduct an interview with	Interview
Effect a termination	Terminate (or end)
Extend an invitation	Invite
Formulate a response	Respond

Give an indication of	Indicate (or show)
Give consideration to	Consider
Grant authorisation for	Authorise
Include an exemption for	Exempt
Make/take a decision	Decide
Make an assessment of	Assess
Perform an evaluation of	Evaluate
Provide assistance to	Assist (or help)
Provide justification for	Justify
Result in a reduction in	Reduce
Show a preference for	Prefer
Take action concerning	Act on
Undertake a review of	Review