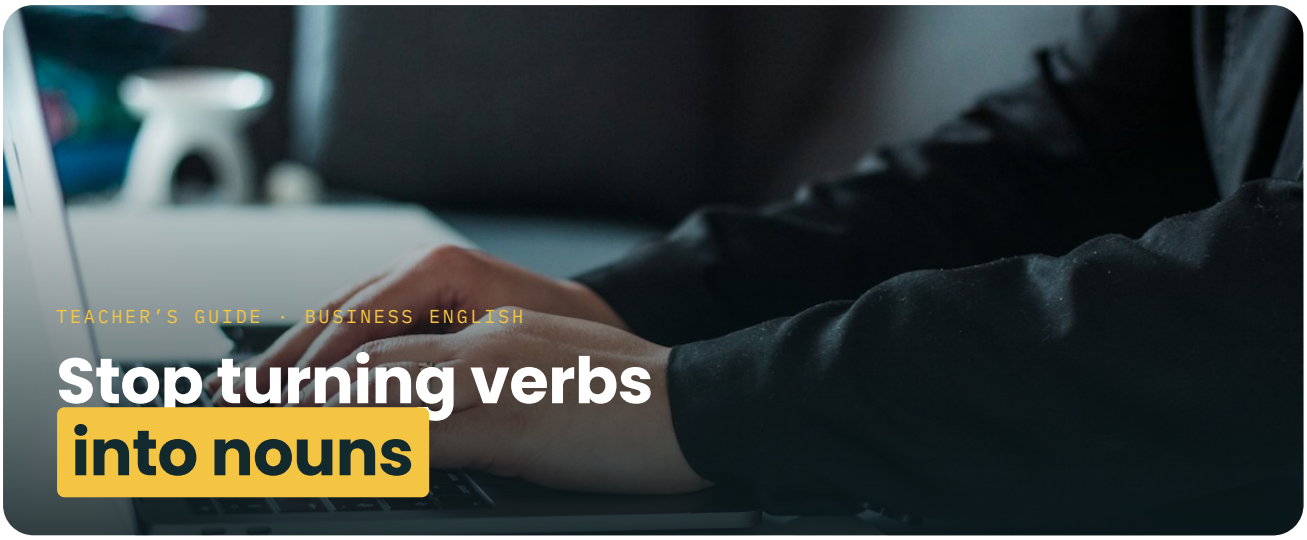

TEACHER'S GUIDE · BUSINESS ENGLISH

Stop turning verbs into nouns

LEVEL
B1 · Intermediate

TIME
60 min

SKILLS
Listening · Writing · Grammar · Speaking

Learning objectives

In this lesson, you can:

- recognise nominalisation (nouns made from verbs) in business writing
- form nouns from verbs with -tion, -ment, -ance, -age
- rewrite long, noun-heavy sentences with clear verbs
- decide when a noun is the natural choice

Key vocabulary

nominalisation · decision · increase · usage · breakage · statement · receipt · rephrase · straightforward · sophisticated

Materials

- this worksheet
- video: *Stop turning verbs into nouns: Business writing skills part 6* (Ohsten Words, YouTube, 1 min 59 s)

1 Warm up

SPEAKING

Look at the pictures. What can you see? How are they connected to the topic? Then answer the questions with your teacher.



PICTURE A · writing an email



PICTURE B · a printer in an office



PICTURE C · a stainless steel factory

1. What do you write at work every week: emails, reports, presentations?
2. Do you prefer short, simple messages or formal, detailed ones? Why?
3. Read these two sentences. Which is clearer? "Sales have increased." / "There has been an increase in sales."

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2 Vocabulary preparation

VOCABULARY

Part A Match the words with the definitions.

sophisticated *(adj)* · breakage *(n)* · rephrase *(v)* · formality *(n)* · straightforward *(adj)* · usage *(n)*

1. _____ clear and easy to understand; not complicated
2. _____ to say or write something again in different words
3. _____ the way something is used
4. _____ complex and intelligent-sounding; showing experience
5. _____ damage that happens when something breaks
6. _____ a serious, official style of language or behaviour

Part B Write the noun form of each verb. All the nouns are in the video.

1. decide → _____
2. increase → _____
3. use → _____
4. break → _____
5. state → _____
6. receive → _____

3 Main input: watch and learn

LISTENING · WRITING

Business writers often turn verbs into nouns to sound more professional. This short video from a business-writing channel explains why that can be a problem. Watch it with English captions.

VIDEO

Stop turning verbs into nouns: Business writing skills part 6
Ohsten Words · YouTube · 20 June 2023 · 1 min 59 s · free, no login
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_e7IWDuF1sk

Watch once. What is the main advice in the video? Write one sentence.

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Language focus: nominalisation (verb → noun)

Nominalisation means using a noun instead of a verb: *decide → a decision*. Many nouns are formed from verbs with these endings:

Ending	Verb	Noun
-tion / -sion	decide, inform, utilise	decision, information, utilisation
-ment	state, agree, improve	statement, agreement, improvement
-ance / -ence	perform, prefer	performance, preference
-age	use, break	usage, breakage
no change	increase, delay, change	an increase, a delay, a change

Nouns usually need **extra words**: *Sales have increased* (3 words) → *There has been an increase in sales* (7 words). Use a **verb** to be clear and direct. Use a **noun** when it is the natural word (*a receipt, a statement*) or in formal reports. British *-ise* (utilise) = American *-ize* (utilize).

Practice: Rewrite the sentences with a verb. Make them shorter and clearer.

1. We made a decision to close the office. → We _____
2. There was a delay in the delivery. → The delivery _____
3. The team carried out an investigation of the problem. → The team _____
4. Our recommendation is the replacement of the old software. → We recommend _____
5. There has been an improvement in customer satisfaction. → Customer satisfaction _____
6. We are in agreement with your proposal. → We _____

4 Listening comprehension

LISTENING

Part A Watch again. Are the sentences true (T) or false (F)? Circle.

1. According to the video, business writing often turns verbs into nouns to appear more sophisticated. **T / F**
2. "There has been an increase in sales" is shorter than "Sales have increased". **T / F**
3. In the printer example, the nominalisations are "usage" and "breakage". **T / F**
4. The video suggests "We use stainless steel" as a simpler sentence. **T / F**
5. The video says you should never use nominalisation. **T / F**
6. If a simple sentence sounds unremarkable, perhaps the information is not worth mentioning. **T / F**

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Part B Choose the correct answer.

1. Why do business writers nominalise, according to the video?
   (a) to make sentences shorter (b) to appear more sophisticated (c) to avoid grammar mistakes
2. What is the problem with unnecessary nominalisation?
   (a) it makes sentences longer and more complicated (b) it is grammatically wrong
   (c) it sounds too informal
3. Which is a natural use of a noun in the video?
   (a) I made a breakage of the printer. (b) We specialise in the utilisation of steel.
   (c) I have a receipt for this t-shirt.
4. If your sentence sounds too basic when you simplify it, the problem could be...
   (a) the grammar (b) your message (c) the reader

Part C Think and answer.

1. Rewrite "We specialise in the utilisation of stainless steel" in two ways.

2. Why do people use formal nouns in business writing?

3. Think of a document you write at work. Where could you use more verbs?

5 Speaking practice and discussion

SPEAKING

Part A Choose TWO cue cards. Talk about each card with your teacher for 1–2 minutes.

Cue card 1: My emails

- Who do I write to?
- Formal or simple?
- One example

Cue card 2: Reports

- Long sentences?
- Too many nouns?
- How to improve

Cue card 3: Clear writing

- Why it matters
- For clients
- For colleagues

Cue card 4: A confusing message

- What it said
- Why it was unclear
- What happened

Cue card 5: Sounding professional

- Formal words
- Simple words
- The right balance

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Part B Answer the questions with your teacher. Give reasons and examples.

1. Is it more professional to write in a formal style? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever received an email that was difficult to understand? What was the problem?
3. When is a noun the best choice in your work documents?
4. Do you think long, formal sentences hide weak ideas? Give an example.
5. What is one change you will make to your writing after this lesson?

6 Lesson takeaway and wrap-up

REVIEW

Complete the sentences. Then tell your teacher.

1. Nominalisation means _____
2. Three nouns made from verbs: _____
3. One sentence I can make clearer with a verb: _____
4. I should only use a noun when _____

Takeaway: Nominalisation turns verbs into nouns (*decide → decision*). It can sound sophisticated, but it adds words and makes sentences harder to read. Prefer verbs (*Sales have increased*), and use a noun only when it makes your writing more, not less, straightforward.

+ Optional extension / homework

WRITING

Choose a short paragraph from a work email or report (remove any confidential information). Underline three nominalisations and rewrite the sentences with verbs. Bring both versions to the next class.

Alternative activity: Write a 100-word email to a client about a delay in a delivery, first in a very formal, noun-heavy style, then in a clear style with verbs.

References

Ohsten Words. (2023, June 20). *Stop turning verbs into nouns: Business writing skills part 6* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_e7lWDuF1sk

Original materials: vocabulary, language examples and exercises were written for NATeacher for B1 learners.

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Teacher's guide

Learning objectives. By the end of the lesson, the student can: recognise nominalisations; form nouns from verbs with common suffixes; rewrite noun-heavy sentences with verbs; judge when a noun is the natural choice. **Total time:** approx. 60 minutes — Warm up 6 · Vocabulary 8 · Main input 12 · Comprehension 12 · Speaking 16 · Wrap-up 6. The extension is optional homework.

▶. Main input: about the resource

Resource: Stop turning verbs into nouns: Business writing skills part 6, Ohsten Words, YouTube (20 June 2023). Free; no login. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_e7IWDuF1sk

What to use: the whole video (1 min 59 s). Turn on the English (United Kingdom) captions. The description links to a paid course: do not use it.

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Key information: The video says business writing is forever turning verbs into nouns to appear more sophisticated, e.g. "Have you reached a decision?" instead of "Have you decided?" and "There has been an increase in sales" rather than "Sales have increased". This is called nominalisation. When it is unnecessary, sentences become longer and more complicated because you need extra words for the same meaning. Example: "Incorrect usage of the printer could result in breakage" (nominalisations: usage, breakage) → "Use the printer correctly so you don't break it." "We specialise in the utilisation of stainless steel" → "We utilise stainless steel" or "We use stainless steel." If a sentence sounds too basic when simplified, the problem could be the message: formality can make information sound more important than it is. Nominalisation is part of everyday language and sometimes the best or only way to say something ("I have a receipt for this t-shirt", "I'm writing a statement"). Only nominalise when it makes writing more, not less, straightforward.

1. Warm up

6 mins.

Show the pictures and ask the questions. Write the two sales sentences on screen and count the words together.

Possible answers: "I write a lot of emails to clients." "Simple messages, because people are busy." "'Sales have increased' is clearer and shorter."

Support: give a frame: I write... to... every... **Challenge:** ask the student to say the sales sentence in two more ways.

2. Vocabulary preparation

8 mins.

The student completes Part A and Part B alone. Check together, say the words aloud and ask the student to repeat the difficult ones.

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Part A

1. straightforward
2. rephrase
3. usage
4. sophisticated
5. breakage
6. formality

Part B

1. decision
2. increase
3. usage
4. breakage
5. statement
6. receipt

Spelling: The video uses British spelling: *nominalisation, utilise, specialise*. American English: *nominalization, utilize, specialize*. Both are correct; be consistent.

3. Main input and language focus

12 mins.

Play the video once for the gist, then a second time with captions. Pause at 0:42 and 1:02 and ask the student to rephrase the examples before the speaker does. **Answers:** Only nominalise when it makes your writing clearer; in many cases, use verbs.

Present the language focus in 1–2 minutes: elicit the rule from the examples, then move to the practice.

Practice

1. decided to close the office.
2. was delayed.
3. investigated the problem.
4. replacing the old software.
5. has improved.
6. agree with your proposal.

Common mistakes: "We made a decide" → "We made a decision" / "We decided"; "The usage of the printer" is fine but "the use of" is more natural; forgetting the article with noun forms ("There was delay" → "There was a delay"); wrong suffix ("improvation" → "improvement", "agreation" → "agreement").

4. Listening comprehension

12 mins.

The student works alone. Check together and ask the student to find the evidence in the source.

Part A

1. T 2. F (it is longer) 3. T 4. T 5. F (sometimes it is the best, or only, way) 6. T

Part B

1. b 2. a 3. c 4. b

Part C

1. We utilise stainless steel. / We use stainless steel. 2. to sound more sophisticated or to make information sound more important. 3. Open answer.

Accept: rewrites with a correct verb and the same meaning, even if not identical to the key. **Support:** give the verb in brackets for each sentence. **Challenge:** the student writes a formal and a plain version of one of his/her own work sentences.

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5. Speaking practice and discussion

16 mins (cue cards 5 · questions 11).

The student chooses two cards and speaks for 1–2 minutes on each. Then ask the five questions one by one. Let the student finish, then ask follow-up questions: "Why?", "Can you give an example?", "What would happen if...?"

Model answer (Q4): "Yes, sometimes. In my company, some reports use very formal language, for example 'the implementation of the new strategy'. When you rewrite it as 'we started the new strategy', you see that the idea is quite simple. So I think clear verbs help us check if the message is strong."

Evaluate: correct noun and verb forms; clear, shorter rewrites; reasons and examples in speaking; range of vocabulary. **Correction:** note mistakes while the student speaks and correct 2–3 of them at the end, so you don't interrupt fluency.

6. Lesson takeaway and wrap-up

6 mins.

The student completes the sentences and says them aloud.

Possible answers: "...using a noun instead of a verb." "decision, statement, usage." "We investigated the problem." "...it makes the sentence clearer, or it is the natural word (a receipt)."

+. Optional extension / homework

Check: nominalisations identified correctly; rewritten sentences are shorter and keep the same meaning; correct verb tenses.

✓. Did the student reach the objectives?

Can the student identify nominalisations in a sentence? Can the student form nouns with -tion, -ment, -ance, -age? Can the student rewrite a noun-heavy sentence with a verb? Can the student explain when a noun is appropriate?

✓. Resource verification log

Resource	Institution / URL	Type · length	Checks (20 Nov 2026)	Result
Stop turning verbs into nouns: Business writing skills part 6	Ohsten Words, business-writing training channel on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_e7IWDuF1sk	YouTube video · 1 min 59 s	Page loads in a browser; content matches the exercises; free, no login; suitable for B1; business-writing channel, not a language school; video chosen by NATeacher	**Approved**

Photos: credits listed in the references (Unsplash). No image links are included in the worksheet.

References

Ohsten Words. (2023, June 20). *Stop turning verbs into nouns: Business writing skills part 6* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_e7IWDuF1sk

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