

Lesson

3

Actions

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action.

—WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *HAMLET*, 3.2

I am unlikely to trust a sentence that comes easily.

—WILLIAM GASS

UNDERSTANDING HOW WE EXPRESS JUDGMENTS

We have words enough to praise writing we like—*clear, direct, concise*—and more than enough to abuse writing we don't: *unclear, indirect, abstract, dense, complex*. We can use those words to distinguish these two sentences:

1a. The cause of our schools' failure at teaching basic skills is not understanding the influence of cultural background on learning.

1b. Our schools have failed to teach basic skills because they do not understand how cultural background influences the way a child learns.

Most of us would call (1a) too complex, (1b) clearer and more direct. But those words don't refer to anything *in* those sentences; they describe how those sentences make us *feel*. When we say that (1a) is *unclear*, we mean that *we* have a hard time understanding it; we say it's *dense* when *we* struggle to read it.

The problem is to understand what is *in* those two sentences that makes readers feel as they do. Only then can you rise above your too-good understanding of your own writing to know when

your readers will think it needs revising. To do that, you have to know what counts as a well-told story. (To profit from this lesson and the next three, you must be able to identify verbs, SIMPLE SUBJECTS, and WHOLE SUBJECTS. See the Glossary.)

TELLING STORIES ABOUT CHARACTERS AND THEIR ACTIONS

This story has a problem:

2a. Once upon a time, as a walk through the woods was taking place on the part of Little Red Riding Hood, the Wolf's jump out from behind a tree occurred, causing her fright.

We prefer something closer to this:

- ✓ 2b. Once upon a time, Little Red Riding Hood was walking through the woods, when the Wolf jumped out from behind a tree and frightened her.

Most readers think (2b) tells its story more clearly than (2a), because it follows two principles:

- Its main characters are subjects of verbs.
- Those verbs express specific actions.

Principle of Clarity 1: Make Main Characters Subjects

Look at the subjects in (2a). The simple subjects (underlined) are *not* the main characters (italicized):

2a. Once upon a time, as a walk through the woods was taking place on the part of *Little Red Riding Hood*, *the Wolf's* jump out from behind a tree occurred, causing *her* fright.

Those subjects do not name characters; they name actions expressed in abstract NOUNS, *walk* and *jump*:

SUBJECT

a walk through the woods

the Wolf's jump out from behind a tree

VERB

was taking place

occurred

The whole subject of *occurred* does have a character *in* it: *the Wolf's jump*. But *the Wolf* is not *the* subject. It is only attached to the simple subject *jump*.

Contrast those abstract subjects with these, where the characters (*italicized*) are also the simple subjects (underlined):

2b. Once upon a time, Little Red Riding Hood was walking through the woods, when the Wolf jumped out from behind a tree and frightened *her*.

The subjects and the main characters are now the same words:

SUBJECT/CHARACTER	VERB
<i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>	was walking
<i>the Wolf</i>	jumped

Principle of Clarity 2: Make Important Actions Verbs

Now look at how the actions and verbs differ in (2a): its actions are not expressed in verbs but in abstract nouns (actions are bold-faced; verbs are capitalized):

2a. Once upon a time, as a **walk** through the woods WAS TAKING place on the part of Little Red Riding Hood, the Wolf's **jump** out from behind a tree OCCURRED, causing her **fright**.

Note how vague the verbs are: *was taking, occurred*. In (2b), the clearer sentence, the verbs name specific actions:

- ✓ 2b. Once upon a time, Little Red Riding Hood **WAS WALKING** through the woods, when the Wolf **JUMPED** out from behind a tree and **FRIGHTENED** her.

Here's the point: In (2a), the sentence that seems wordy and indirect, the two main characters, Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, are *not* subjects, and their actions—*walk, jump, and fright*—are *not* verbs. In (2b), the more direct sentence, those two main characters *are* subjects and their main actions *are* verbs. That's why we prefer (2b).

FAIRY TALES AND ACADEMIC OR PROFESSIONAL WRITING

Fairy tales may seem distant from writing in college or on the job. But they're not, because most sentences are still about characters doing things. Compare these two:

3a. The Federalists' argument in regard to the destabilization of government by popular democracy was based on their belief in the

tendency of factions to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

- ✓ 3b. The Federalists argued that popular democracy destabilized government, because they believed that factions tended to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

We can analyze those sentences as we did the ones about Little Red Riding Hood.

Sentence (3a) feels dense for two reasons. First, its characters are not subjects. Its simple subject (underlined) is *argument*, but the characters (italicized) are *Federalists*, *popular democracy*, *government*, and *factions*:

3a. *The Federalists'* argument in regard to the destabilization of government by *popular democracy* was based on *their* belief in the tendency of *factions* to further *their* self-interest at the expense of the common good.

Second, most of the actions (boldfaced) are not verbs (capitalized), but abstract nouns:

3a. The Federalists' **argument** in regard to the **destabilization** of government by popular democracy WAS BASED on their **belief** in the **tendency** of factions to FURTHER their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

Notice how long and complex is the whole subject of (3a) and how little meaning is expressed by its main verb *was based*:

WHOLE SUBJECT

VERB

The Federalists' argument in regard to the destabilization of government by popular democracy was based

Readers think (3b) is clearer for two reasons: the characters (italicized) are subjects (underlined), and the actions (boldfaced) are verbs (capitalized):

3b. *The Federalists* **ARGUED** that *popular democracy* **DESTABILIZED** government, because *they* **BELIEVED** that *factions* **TENDED TO FURTHER** *their* self-interest at the expense of the common good.

Note as well that all those whole subjects are short, specific, and concrete:

WHOLE SUBJECT/CHARACTER

VERB/ACTION

the Federalists

argued

popular democracy

destabilized

they

believed

factions

tended to further

In the rest of this lesson, we look at actions and verbs; in the next, at characters and subjects.

VERBS AND ACTIONS

Our principle is this: *A sentence seems clear when its important actions are in verbs.*

Look at how sentences (4a) and (4b) express their actions. In (4a), actions (boldfaced) are not verbs (capitalized); they are nouns:

4a. Our **lack** of data PREVENTED **evaluation** of UN **actions** in **targeting** funds to areas most in **need** of **assistance**.

In (4b), on the other hand, the actions are almost all verbs:

✓ 4b. Because we **LACKED** data, we could not **EVALUATE** whether the UN **HAD TARGETED** funds to areas that most **NEEDED assistance**.

Readers will think your writing is dense if you use lots of abstract nouns, especially those derived from verbs and ADJECTIVES, nouns ending in *-tion*, *-ment*, *-ence*, and so on, *especially when you make those abstract nouns the subjects of verbs.*

A noun derived from a verb or adjective has a technical name: NOMINALIZATION. The word illustrates its meaning: When we nominalize *nominalize*, we create the nominalization *nominalization*. Here are a few examples:

VERB → NOMINALIZATION			ADJECTIVE → NOMINALIZATION		
discover	→	discovery	careless	→	carelessness
resist	→	resistance	different	→	difference
react	→	reaction	proficient	→	proficiency

We can also nominalize a verb by adding *-ing* (making it a GERUND):

She flies → her flying

We sang → our singing

Some nominalizations and verbs are identical:

hope → hope result → result repair → repair

We **REQUEST** that you **REVIEW** the data.

Our **request** is that you DO a **review** of the data.

(Some actions also hide out in adjectives: *It is applicable* → *it applies*. Some others: *indicative*, *dubious*, *argumentative*, *deserving*.)

No element of style more characterizes turgid writing, writing that feels abstract, indirect, and difficult, than lots of nominalizations, especially as the subjects of verbs.

Here's the point: In grade school, we learned that subjects *are* characters (or “doers”) and that verbs *are* actions. That's often true:

subject	verb	object
We	discussed	the problem.
doer	action	

But it is not true for this almost synonymous sentence:

subject	verb		
The problem	was	the topic	of our discussion.
		doer	action

We can move characters and actions around in a sentence, and subjects and verbs don't have to name any particular kind of thing at all. But when you match characters to subjects and actions to verbs in most of your sentences, readers are likely to think your prose is clear, direct, and readable.

Exercise 3.1

If you aren't sure whether you can distinguish verbs, adjectives, and nominalizations, practice on the list below. Turn verbs and adjectives into nominalizations, and nominalizations into adjectives and verbs. Remember that some verbs and nominalizations have the same form:

Poverty predictably **CAUSES** social problems.

Poverty is a predictable **CAUSE** of social problems.

analysis	believe	attempt	conclusion	evaluate
suggest	approach	comparison	define	discuss
expression	failure	intelligent	thorough	appearance
decrease	improve	increase	accuracy	careful
emphasize	explanation	description	clear	examine

Exercise 3.2

Identify the subject, character, verb, and action in these pairs of sentences. The unclear sentence is first; the improved sentence follows. What do you notice about how characters and subjects, and actions and verbs, are aligned in each?

- 1a. There is opposition among many voters to nuclear power plants based on a belief in their threat to human health.
- 1b. Many voters oppose nuclear power plants because they believe that such plants threaten human health.
- 2a. There has been growth in the market for electronic books because of the frequent preference among customers for their convenience and portability.
- 2b. The market for electronic books has grown because customers frequently prefer their convenience and portability.
- 3a. There is a belief among some researchers that consumers' choices in fast food restaurants would be healthier if there were postings of nutrition information in their menus.
- 3b. Some researchers believe that consumers would choose healthier foods if fast food companies posted nutrition information in their menus.
- 4a. The design of the new roller coaster was more of a struggle for the engineers than had been their expectation.
- 4b. The engineers struggled more than they expected when designing the new roller coaster.
- 5a. Because the student's preparation for the exam was thorough, none of the questions on it were a surprise.
- 5b. Because the student prepared thoroughly for the exam, she was not surprised by any of the questions on it.

Exercise 3.3

Create three sentences using verbs and adjectives from Exercise 3.1. Then rewrite them using the corresponding nominalizations (keep the meaning the same). For example, using *suggest*, *discuss*, and *careful*, write:

I SUGGEST that we DISCUSS the issue CAREFULLY.

Then rewrite that sentence into its nominalized form:

My **suggestion** is that our **discussion** of the issue be done with **care**.

Only when you see how a clear sentence can be made unclear will you understand why it seemed clear in the first place.

DIAGNOSIS AND REVISION: CHARACTERS AND ACTIONS

You can use the principles of verbs as actions and subjects as characters to explain why your readers judge your prose as they do. But more important, you can also use them to identify and revise sentences that seem clear to you but not to your readers. Revision is a three-step process: diagnose, analyze, rewrite.

1. Diagnose

- a. Ignoring short (four- or five-word) introductory phrases, underline the first seven or eight words in each sentence.

The outsourcing of high-tech work to Asia by corporations means the loss of jobs for many American workers.

- b. Then look for two results:

- You underlined abstract nouns as simple subjects (boldfaced).

The **outsourcing** of high-tech work to Asia by corporations means the loss of jobs for many American workers.

- You underlined seven or eight words before getting to a verb.

The outsourcing of high-tech work to Asia by corporations (10 words) **means** the loss of jobs for many American workers.

2. Analyze

- a. Decide who your main characters are, particularly the flesh-and-blood ones (more about this in the next lesson).

The outsourcing of high-tech work to Asia by **corporations** means the loss of jobs for **many American workers**.

- b. Then look for the actions that those characters perform, especially actions in nominalizations, those abstract nouns derived from verbs.

The **outsourcing** of high-tech work to Asia by corporations means the **loss** of jobs for many American workers.

3. Rewrite

- a. If the actions are nominalizations, make them verbs.

outsourcing → outsource loss → lose

- b. Make the characters the subjects of those verbs.

corporations outsource American workers lose

- c. Rewrite the sentence with subordinating conjunctions such as *because*, *if*, *when*, *although*, *why*, *how*, *whether*, or *that*.

✓ Many middle-class American workers are losing their jobs, **because** corporations are outsourcing their high-tech work to Asia.

SOME COMMON PATTERNS

You can quickly spot and revise five common patterns of nominalizations.

1. **The nominalization is the subject of an empty verb such as *be*, *seems*, *has*, etc.:**

The **intention** of the committee is to audit the records.

- a. Change the nominalization to a verb:

intention → intend

- b. Find a character that would be the subject of that verb:

The intention of *the committee* is to audit the records.

- c. Make that character the subject of the new verb:

✓ *The committee* **INTENDS** to audit the records.

2. **The nominalization follows an empty verb:**

The *agency* CONDUCTED an **investigation** into the matter.

- a. Change the nominalization to a verb:

investigation → investigate

- b. Replace the empty verb with the new verb:

conducted → investigated

✓ The *agency* **INVESTIGATED** the matter.

3. **One nominalization is the subject of an empty verb and a second nominalization follows it:**

Our **loss** in sales WAS a result of their **expansion** of outlets.

- a. Revise the nominalizations into verbs:

loss → lose expansion → expand

- b. Identify the characters that would be the subjects of those verbs:

Our **loss** in sales was a result of *their* **expansion** of outlets.

- c. Make those characters subjects of those verbs:

we lose they expand

- d. Link the new CLAUSES with a logical connection:

- To express simple cause: *because, since, when*
- To express conditional cause: *if, provided that, so long as*
- To contradict expected causes: *though, although, unless*

Our loss in sales	→	We LOST sales
was the result of	→	because
their expansion of outlets	→	<i>they</i> EXPANDED outlets

4. **A nominalization follows *there is* or *there are*:**

There is no **need** for *our* further **study** of this problem.

- a. Change the nominalization to a verb:

need → need study → study

- b. Identify the character that should be the subject of the verb:

There is no **need** for *our* further **study** of this problem.

- c. Make that character the subject of the verb:

no need → we need not our study → we study

✓ We **NEED** not **STUDY** this problem further.

5. **Two or three nominalizations in a row are joined by prepositions:**

We did a **review** of the **evolution** of the brain.

- a. Turn the first nominalization into a verb:

review → review

- b. Either leave the second nominalization as it is, or turn it into a verb in a clause beginning with *how* or *why*:

evolution of the brain → how the brain evolved

✓ First, we **REVIEWED** the **evolution** of the *brain*.

✓ First, we **REVIEWED** how the brain **EVOLVED**.

QUICK TIP: When you revise a complicated sentence, you will have more than one character-action clause. Decide how the clauses fit together, then try out these patterns: *X because Y; Since X, Y; If X, then Y; Although X, Y; X and/ but/so Y.*

SOME HAPPY CONSEQUENCES

When you consistently rely on verbs to express key actions, your readers benefit in many ways:

1. Your sentences are more concrete, because they will have concrete subjects and verbs. Compare:

There **WAS** an affirmative **decision** for **expansion**.

✓ *The Director* **DECIDED** to **EXPAND** the program.

2. Your sentences are more concise. When you use nominalizations, you have to add articles like *a* and *the* and prepositions such as *of*, *by*, and *in*. You don't need them when you use verbs and conjunctions:

A **revision** of the program **WILL RESULT in** **increases** in our **efficiency in the servicing** of clients.

✓ *If* we **REVISE** the program, we **CAN SERVE** clients more **EFFICIENTLY**.

3. The logic of your sentences is clearer. When you nominalize verbs, you link actions with fuzzy prepositions and PHRASES such as *of*, *by*, and *on the part of*. But when you use verbs, you link clauses with precise subordinating conjunctions such as *because*, *although*, and *if*:

Our more effective presentation of our study resulted in our success, despite an earlier start by others.

✓ **Although** others started earlier, we succeeded **because** we presented our study more effectively.

4. Your sentence tells a more coherent story. Nominalizations let you distort the sequence of actions. (The numbers refer to the real sequence of events.)

Decisions⁴ in regard to administration⁵ of medication despite inability² of an irrational patient appearing¹ in a Trauma Center to provide legal consent³ rest with the attending physician alone.

When we revise those actions into verbs and reorder them, you get a more coherent narrative:

- ✓ When a patient appears¹ in a Trauma Center and behaves² so irrationally that he cannot legally consent³ to treatment, only the attending physician can decide⁴ whether to medicate⁵ him.

A COMMON PROBLEM SOLVED

You've probably had this experience: you think you've written something good, but your reader thinks otherwise. You wonder whether that person is just being difficult, but you bite your tongue and try to fix it, even though you think it should already be clear to anyone who can read Dr. Seuss. When that happens to me (regularly, I might add), I almost always realize—eventually—that my readers are right, that they see where my writing needs work better than I do.

Why are we so often right about the writing of others and so often wrong about our own? It is because we all read into our own writing what we want readers to get out of it. That explains why two readers can disagree about the clarity of the same piece of writing: the reader who is most familiar with its content will likely find it clearest. Both are right. Clarity is in the eye of more or less informed beholders.

That is why we need to look at our own writing in a way that is almost mechanical, that sidesteps our too-good understanding of it. The quickest way is to underline the first seven or eight words of every sentence. If you don't see in those words a character as a subject and a verb as a specific action, you have a candidate for revision.

QUICK TIP: When you revise a longer piece of work, look first at those passages that were hard to write because you didn't fully understand your ideas. We all tend to write badly when we're unsure about what we want to say or how to say it.

Exercise 3.4

One sentence in each of these pairs is clear, expressing characters as subjects and actions as verbs; the other is less clear, with actions in nominalizations and characters often not in subjects. First, identify which is which. Then circle nominalizations, bracket verbs,

and underline subjects. Then put a “c” over characters that seem to perform actions.

- 1a. Some people argue that atmospheric carbon dioxide does not elevate global temperature.
- 1b. There has been speculation by educators about the role of the family in improving educational achievement.
- 2a. The store’s price increases led to frustration among its customers.
- 2b. When we write concisely, readers understand easily.
- 3a. Researchers have identified the AIDS virus but have failed to develop a vaccine to immunize those at risk.
- 3b. Attempts by economists at defining full employment have been met with failure.
- 4a. Complaints by editorial writers about voter apathy rarely offer suggestions about dispelling it.
- 4b. Although critics claim that children who watch a lot of television tend to become less able readers, no one has demonstrated that to be true.
- 5a. The loss of market share to Japan by domestic automakers resulted in the disappearance of hundreds of thousands of jobs.
- 5b. When educators embrace new-media technology, our schools will teach complex subjects more effectively.
- 6a. We need to know which parts of our national forests are being logged most extensively so that we can save virgin stands at greatest risk.
- 6b. There is a need for an analysis of library use to provide a reliable base for the projection of needed resources.
- 7a. Many professional athletes fail to realize that they are unprepared for life after stardom because their teams protect them from the problems that the rest of us face every day.
- 7b. Colleges now have an understanding that yearly tuition increases are impossible because of strong parental resistance to the soaring cost of higher education.

Exercise 3.5

Now revise the nominalized sentences in Exercise 3.4 into sentences in which the actions are verbs. Use its paired verbal version as a model. For example, if the verbal sentence begins with *when*, begin your revision with *when*:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| Sentence to
revise: | 2a. The store’s price increases led to frustration among its customers. |
| Model: | 2b. When we WRITE concisely, readers UNDERSTAND more easily. |
| Your revision: | 2a. When the store INCREASED prices, . . . |

Exercise 3.6

Revise these next sentences so that the nominalizations are verbs and characters are their subjects. In (1) through (5), characters are italicized and nominalizations are boldfaced.

1. *Lincoln's hope* was for the **preservation** of the Union without war, but the *South's attack* on Fort Sumter made war an **inevitability**.
2. **Attempts** were made on the part of the *president's aides* to assert *his immunity* from a *congressional subpoena*.
3. There were **predictions** by *business executives* that the *economy* would experience a quick **revival**.
4. *Your analysis* of my report omits any data in **support** of your **criticism** of my **findings**.
5. The *health care industry's inability* to exert cost **controls** could lead to the *public's decision* that *congressional action* is needed.

In sentences 6 through 10, the characters are italicized; find the actions and revise.

6. A *papal* appeal was made to the world's rich *nations* for assistance to those facing the threat of *African* starvation.
7. Attempts at explaining increases in *voter* participation in this year's elections were made by *several candidates*.
8. The agreement by the *class* on the reading list was based on the assumption that there would be tests on only certain selections.
9. There was no independent *business-sector* study of the cause of the sudden increase in the trade surplus.
10. An understanding as to the need for controls over drinking on campus was recognized by *fraternities*.

Exercise 3.7

Revise these sentences. At the end of each is a hint. For example:

Congress's **reduction** of the deficit resulted in the **decline** of interest rates. [because]

✓ Interest rates **DECLINED** because Congress **REDUCED** the deficit.

1. The use of models in teaching prose style does not result in improvements of clarity and directness in student writing. [Although we use . . .]
2. Precision in plotting the location of building foundations enhances the possibility of its accurate reconstruction. [When we precisely plot . . .]

3. Any departures by the members from established procedures may cause termination of membership by the Board. [If members . . .]
4. A student's lack of socialization into a field may lead to writing problems because of his insufficient understanding about arguments by professionals in that field. [When . . ., . . ., because . . .]
5. The successful implementation of a new curriculum depends on the cooperation of faculty with students in setting achievable goals within a reasonable time. [To implement . . ., . . .]

A QUALIFICATION: USEFUL NOMINALIZATIONS

I have so relentlessly urged you to turn nominalizations into verbs that you might think you should never use one. But in fact, you can't write well without them. The trick is to know which to keep and which to revise. Keep these:

1. **A nominalization that is a short subject that refers to a previous sentence:**

- ✓ **These arguments** all depend on a single unproven claim.
- ✓ **This decision** can lead to positive outcomes.

Those nominalizations link one sentence to another in a cohesive flow, an issue I'll discuss in more detail in Lesson 5.

2. **A short nominalization that replaces an awkward *The fact that*:**

The fact that she **ADMITTED** guilt impressed me.

- ✓ Her admission of guilt impressed me.

But then, why not this:

- ✓ *She* **IMPRESSED** me when *she* **ADMITTED** her guilt.

3. **A nominalization that names what would be the object of the verb:**

I accepted *what she* **REQUESTED** [that is, *She requested something*].

- ✓ I accepted her **request**.

This kind of nominalization feels more concrete than an abstract one. However, contrast *request* above with this next sentence, where *request* is more of an action:

Her **request** for **assistance** **CAME** after the deadline.

- ✓ She **REQUESTED assistance** after the deadline.

4. **A nominalization that refers to a concept so familiar to your readers that to them, it is a virtual character (more about this in the next lesson):**

- ✓ Few problems have so divided us as **abortion on demand**.
- ✓ The Equal Rights **Amendment** was an issue in past **elections**.
- ✓ **Taxation** without **representation** did not spark the American **Revolution**.

Those nominalizations name familiar concepts: *abortion on demand, amendment, election, taxation, representation, revolution*. You must develop an eye for distinguishing nominalizations expressing common ideas from those you can revise into verbs:

There is a **demand** for a **repeal** of the **inheritance** tax.

- ✓ We **DEMAND** that Congress **REPEAL** the **inheritance** tax.

CLARITY, NOT SIMPLEMINDEDNESS

Your readers want you to write clearly, but not in Dick-and-Jane sentences. Some argue that all sentences should be short, no more than fifteen or twenty words. But many mature ideas are too complicated to express so compactly. In Lessons 10 and 11 we look at ways to revise too-short, too-simple sentences into a style that is readable but still complex enough to communicate complex ideas.

IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Exercise 3.8

Go through a page of your own writing. Underline whole subjects and bracket verbs. Now, think about the story you are telling. Circle the main characters and box their actions, wherever they appear. Look especially for actions hidden in nominalizations. What do you notice? How clear will a reader likely find your writing? If necessary, revise to align characters with subjects and specific actions with verbs.

Exercise 3.9

Writers tend to think their writing is clearer than their readers do. Select a page of your writing and share it with a reader. Both of you rate its clarity on a scale of 1–10, with 10 being perfectly clear and 1 being incomprehensible. Use the procedures for diagnosing and analyzing sentences on page 35–36 to explain any difference in your rating. Revise your writing if necessary.

SUMMING UP

The two most general principles for clear sentences are these: make main characters the subjects of your verbs; make those characters’ important actions your verbs.

We can represent these principles graphically. Readers must mentally integrate two levels of sentence structure. One, the grammatical level, is the relatively fixed sequence of subject and verb (the empty box is for everything that follows the verb):

Fixed	Subject	Verb	_____
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The other, the story level, is based on characters and their actions and has no fixed order. Readers prefer these levels to match, for characters to be subjects and their actions to be verbs. We can graphically combine those principles:

Fixed	Subject	Verb	_____
Variable	Character	Action	_____

Keep in mind that readers want to see characters not just *in* a subject, as in these two:

The president’s veto of the bill infuriated Congress.
The veto of the bill by the president infuriated Congress.

Instead, they want to see the character *as* the subject, like this:

✓ When the president_{subject} VETOED_{VERB} the bill, he_{subject} INFURIATED_{verb} Congress.

When you frustrate those expectations, you make readers work harder than necessary. So keep these principles in mind as you revise:

1. Express actions in verbs:

The **intention** of the committee is improvement of morale.

- ✓ The committee **INTENDS** to improve morale.

2. Make the subjects of those verbs the characters associated with those actions:

A decision by *the dean* in regard to the funding of the program by *the department* is necessary for adequate *staff* preparation.

- ✓ *The staff* CAN PREPARE adequately, only after *the dean* DECIDES whether *the department* WILL FUND the program.

3. Don't revise nominalizations when:

a. they refer to a previous sentence:

- ✓ **These arguments** all depend on a single unproven claim.

b. they replace an awkward *The fact that*:

The fact that she strenuously objected impressed me.

- ✓ **Her strenuous objections** impressed me.

c. they name what would be the object of a verb:

I do not know **what she INTENDS**.

- ✓ I do not know **her intentions**.

d. they name a concept so familiar to your readers that it is a virtual character:

- ✓ Few problems have so divided us as **abortion** on **demand**.

- ✓ The Equal Rights **Amendment** was an issue in past **elections**.