

The noun group and nominalization

In this tutorial, you will learn about academic register. By the end of the lesson, you should be able to:

- Read complex and dense groups more easily by breaking down their parts
- Shift your grammar to an academic style.

1. Noun Phrases and Nominalisation

A noun group in English can be very simple: This book/A study.

At primary school level, it is still usually very simple:

Everyone loved *this interesting book* (determiner+ adjective + noun)

A noun group can become increasingly complex when you add information:

- We can have **pre-modifiers** (words that describe the headnoun placed before it):

	Determiners	Numeral (ordinal / cardinal)	Adverbs	Adjectives	Participial adjectives (also known as "-ed"/"-ing" adjectives)	Noun	Headnoun
Ex:	the		fastest		growing		market

- We can have **post-modifiers** (words and clauses or prepositional phrases that come AFTER it):

The following words/phrases/clauses can be found as post-modifiers.

Determiner	Pre-modifier[s]	Headword	Post-modifier[s]
a	major	challenge	to the anthropologist for our judicial system (prepositional phrase)

---	new	theories	based on better or more complete evidence ("ed" participle clause/past participle clause)
the	---	lands	belong ing to these people ("ing" participle clause/present participle clause)
The	new	research	which was conducted last year at MIT (a defining relative clause)

Task 1: recognizing modifiers

Some noun groups are underlined in the extract below. What pre and post modifiers can you see in these noun groups? Note that not all the noun groups are underlined.

A major change which has occurred in the Western family is an increased incidence in divorce. Whereas in the past, divorce was a relatively rare occurrence, in recent times it has become quite commonplace. This change is borne out clearly in census figures. For example, thirty years ago in Australia, only one in ten marriages ended in divorce; nowadays, the figure is more than one in three (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996: p.45). A consequence of this change has been a substantial increase in the number of single parent families and the attendant problems that this brings (Kilmartin, 1997). An important issue for sociologists, and indeed for all of society, is why these changes in marital patterns have occurred. In this essay I will seek to critically examine a number of sociological explanations for the 'divorce phenomenon' and also consider the social policy implications that each explanation carries with it. It will be argued that the best explanations are to be found within a broad socio-economic framework.

One type of explanation for rising divorce has focused on changes in laws relating to marriage. For example, Bilton, Bonnett and Jones (1987) argue that increased rates of divorce do not necessarily indicate that families are now more unstable. It is possible, they claim, that there has always been a degree of marital instability. They suggest that changes in the law have been significant, because they have provided unhappily married couples with 'access to a legal solution to pre-existent marital problems' (p.301). Bilton et al. therefore believe that changes in divorce rates can be best explained in terms of changes in the legal system. The problem with this type of explanation however, is that it does not consider why these laws have changed in the first place. It could be argued that reforms to family law, as well as the increased rate of divorce that has accompanied them, are the product of more fundamental changes in society

<http://www.monash.edu.au/lis/llonline/writing/general/essay/sample-essay/index.xml>

Why do we use Noun Phrases?

Complex noun phrases enable a writer to **condense/pack meaning** to discuss **abstract concepts** in a precise and economical way. Complex noun phrases are also a means to sound more impersonal, taking away the person who 'does' the action (and sometimes hiding the people who is at fault) or presenting a debatable interpretation as an accepted fact.

We use complex noun phrases and nominalizations in Academic English because it would be impossible to discuss abstract complex without the language features that allows us to do so.

Task 2: Exploring the packaging of meaning

Look at the example below. This is a simple sentence composed of a Complex NP + verb + Complex NP.

The escalating cost of higher education is causing many to question the value of continuing education beyond high school.

In the sentence below, find the 2 noun groups and draw a circle around them.

Then underline the headnoun.

Can you recognize the types of modifiers?

Continued exposure to these chemicals can lead to a weakening of the immune system.

Now, imagine you have found your 5 year-old niece playing in the cleaning products cupboard. How would you tell her the message contained in the sentence above? Note that your niece already knows the meaning of immune system. How many sentences would you need? How would the grammar of the sentence be affected?

The process through which you simplified, and unpacked the noun groups, breaking them down to explain each of the meanings contained in the modifiers is what your brain does when reading academic texts. Most of the time, your brain can manage since you have had years of schooling to understand this type of information-packaging. However, when on occasions you struggle to get through a dense sentence and have to go back to the beginning, it is most probably because your brain needs more time to unpack all the conceptual and technical meanings hidden in the noun groups.

<http://linguapress.com/grammar/grammar3.htm>: For a simple explanation of the noun group.

Task 3: Noun groups and Subject verb agreement

Read the example sentence below and answer the questions:

The earnings differential between a high school graduate and a university degree holder **is** such that the initial financial burden that university fees **constitute is** well worthwhile.

What are the subjects for the 3 verbs in bold?

(1).....is such

(2).....constitute

(3).....is

Why is the verb a singular form in (1) (hint: find the headnoun in the noun group that forms the subject for this verb).

Can you work out the rule of agreement between subject and verb?

➔ Rule: The verb **usually** agrees with the headnoun (not necessarily the last noun in the group), so you should always locate the headnoun to ensure you are writing your verb forms accurately.

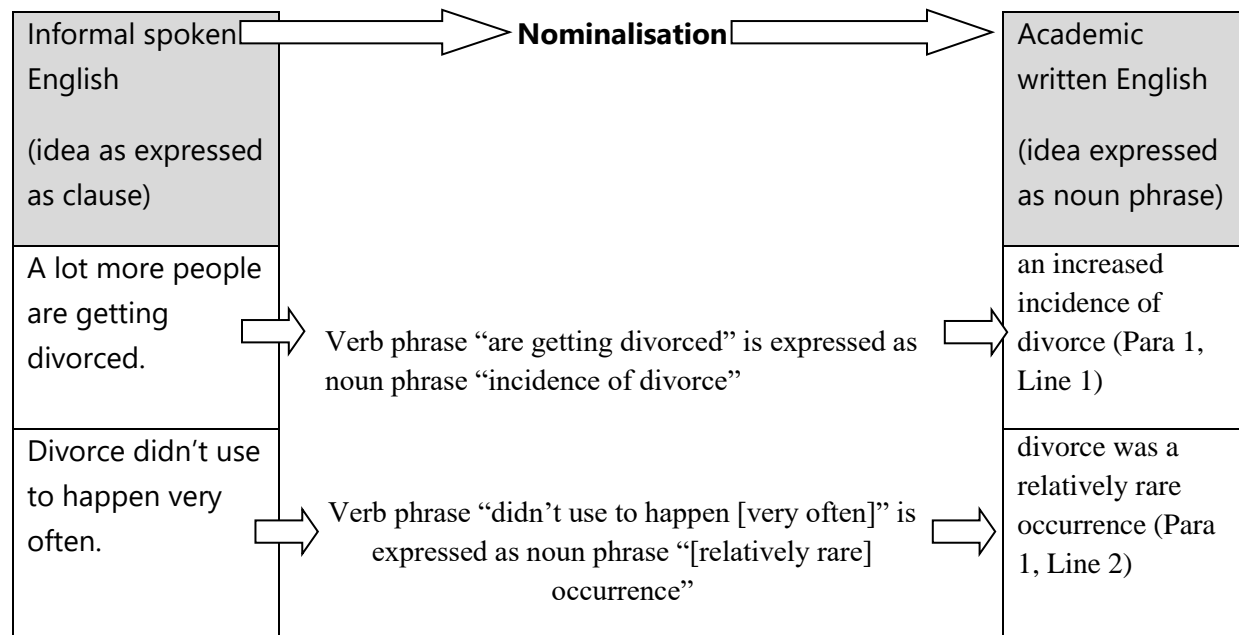
Check the noun groups underlined in the sample text above and check how for each noun group in a subject position, the verb agrees with the noun group's headnoun.

Task 4: Noun groups in disciplinary texts

Look through your disciplinary text(s) and find examples of noun groups. Write them down (with the verb that follows, if in subject position) and analyse their parts (headnoun and types of modifiers).

Nominalisation

This is the process whereby an action (expressed as a clause/verb) is expressed as a noun. This is a common feature in academic writing. For example, compare the informal spoken forms on the left with the noun phrases used in Paragraph 1.



Task 1: Fill in the empty boxes in the table below.

Some tips to move from a spoken grammar to an academic grammar, try the following:

- Take people out
 - Focus on the concept or the phenomenon (make it into a noun and use it as a THEME.
 - Develop the concept further in the NEW
 - Use verbs that carry the logical relation between the THEME and the NEW: x has led to Y/ X is contingent of Y/ X is a result of Y
- => This more abstract grammar is not just a convention. It allows you to discuss abstract concepts rather than staying at the level of who does what.

Para	Informal spoken English (idea as expressed as clause)	Academic written English (idea expressed as noun phrase)
1	Because of this change, there are a lot more families that have only one parent.	
2	People want to have more things	
3		A reduction in divorce statistics
4	If we make it harder for people to get a divorce	
5		A radical restructuring of the economic system
6	People are less and less willing to give money to this type of social welfare program	
7		The growing trend of marital breakdown
8	A time when families are more and more unstable	

Task 2: Practise “translating” from a less formal style to a more academic style by completing the sentences below. The words in the box can help you. One has been done for you as an example.

frequency	education	deforestation	component	reduction	diversity
cooperation	depletion	Incidence	tolerance	productivity	concentration

Example

Less formal style: If we keep cutting down trees in the Amazon region, we will have less oxygen everywhere.

Academic style: Continued deforestation of the Amazon region will lead to worldwide oxygen depletion.

a) **Less formal style:** How much weight you lose depends on how often you exercise.

Academic style:

b) **Less formal style:** Being tolerant of the ways people are different is something that they often try to teach in courses about civics.

Academic style:

c) **Less formal style:** People get cancer more if there's a lot of mercury in the water.

Academic style:

d) **Less formal style:** One of the ways a company can produce more is by encouraging employees to work together.

Academic style:

Task 3: Re-write the sentence by using the noun form of the underlined verbs/adjectives. You may need to i) change word order; ii) change the forms of other words in the phrase; iii) add articles; iv) add prepositions.

Example:

The students' performance has improved → university's ranking has increased

Improvement in student performance has led to an increase in the university's ranking.

1. It is difficult to balance studies and part-time jobs → time management is important

_____ demonstrates _____

2. [People] succeed in examinations → they apply appropriate strategies

_____ is dependent on _____.

3. Information technology has developed rapidly → older generation is occasionally confused

_____ causes _____.

4. Problems in the workplace are solved → [People are] creative

_____ require[s] _____.

(2 possible answers for part 1 of the sentence)

5. [People are] able to speak several languages → better careers are possible

_____ can lead to _____

6. The two countries agreed → they reduced their supplies of nuclear arms.

_____ between _____ resulted in a _____

