

9

Abstract Noun Phrases

Abstract noun phrases may perform all nominal functions.

<i>Subject of verb</i>	His rejection of that good offer surprises me.
<i>Object of verb</i>	I can't understand his rejection of that good offer.
<i>Object of preposition: in prepositional object in adverbial phrase</i>	We talked about his rejection of that good offer. By his rejection of that good offer, he showed very poor judgment.
<i>Subjective complement (predicate noun)</i>	What I can't understand is his rejection of that good offer.
<i>Appositive</i>	I can't understand one thing—his rejection of that good offer.

9-1

FORM OF ABSTRACT NOUNS

Nouns that are used as the grammatical head of abstract noun phrases are derived either from verbs or predicate adjectives. Such nouns may be unchanged in form (to **answer**, verb; an **answer**, noun), but more often they have special derivational endings.

Add the derivational suffixes **-ment**, **-(t)ion**, **-ance**, **-ence** to the following *verbs* to form abstract nouns. Make whatever changes are necessary.

develop _____ apply _____
interrupt _____ resemble _____

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| solve _____ | pronounce _____ |
| encourage _____ | enjoy _____ |
| decide _____ | persuade _____ |
| recognize _____ | interfere _____ |
| avoid _____ | separate _____ |
| obey _____ | compete _____ |
| determine _____ | repeat _____ |
| omit _____ | resist _____ |
| depend _____ | resign _____ |
| abolish _____ | tempt _____ |
| expect _____ | |

Add the derivational suffixes *-(i)ty*, *-ness*, *-th* to the following *adjectives* to form abstract nouns. Make whatever changes are necessary.

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| able _____ | probable _____ |
| curious _____ | lonely _____ |
| foolish _____ | polite _____ |
| happy _____ | moral _____ |
| certain _____ | poor _____ |
| equal _____ | warm _____ |
| holy _____ | sleepy _____ |
| cruel _____ | severe _____ |
| strong _____ | punctual _____ |
| wicked _____ | pure _____ |
| loyal _____ | scarce _____ |

prompt _____ simple _____

stupid _____ truthful _____

9-2

"SUBJECTS" IN ABSTRACT NOUN PHRASES

"Subjects" in abstract noun phrases are used in the same way as "subjects" in gerund phrases.

He is responsible for *the management of the office*.
 (implied "subject" of management is **he**)

All his friends were astounded at *Mr. Smith's arrest for fraud*.
 ("subject" in possessive form)

The police were immediately notified about *the disappearance of the money*.
 ("subject" in of phrase form)

Replace the word **this** in one sentence with an abstract noun phrase made from the other sentence. Some "subjects" referring to persons may be either in possessive form or of phrase form.

EXAMPLE: a. Bombs were exploding on all sides.
This made the inhabitants fear for their lives.
 The explosion of bombs on all sides made the inhabitants fear for their lives.

b. The Senator argued in favor of the bill.
 Many people were convinced by *this*.
 Many people were convinced by the Senator's argument(s) in favor of the bill.
 (*also* the argument(s) of the Senator)

1. He spoke against his opponent.
This was full of insulting epithets.

2. Planes roared overhead.
 For a long time we heard nothing but *this*.

3. She loves to hear *this*.
 The children laugh.

4. Mr. Smith retired at 60.
This surprised his friends.

5. People possess firearms. (omit *people*)
This is a misdemeanor.

6. He was upset by *this*.
His secretary resigned.

7. Athletes from many countries participated.
This should make these sports events more interesting.

8. The factory workers were complaining about the long hours.
We sympathize with *this*.

9. He was suspicious of anything new.
This caused him to be very conservative.

10. His parents are concerned about *this*.
The boy lacks interest in his school work.

11. He is cruel to those below him.
This has finally been discovered by his employer.

12. A traffic policeman has been assigned to that corner because of *this*.
Many accidents have occurred there.

13. Abraham Lincoln is responsible for *this*.
He abolished slavery in 1863. (omit *he*)

14. The Army is sending men to investigate *this*.
Guerrilla fighters are present in the jungle.

15. The museum has been unable to account for *this*.
 Several precious statues have disappeared.
-
-

9-3

“OBJECTS” IN ABSTRACT NOUN PHRASES (1)

In an abstract noun phrase, an original direct object often takes **of** phrase form, or less frequently, possessive form.

The execution **of the prisoners** will cause much public disapproval.
 (compare with the gerund phrase—the executing of the prisoners)
 or **The prisoners’** execution will cause much public disapproval.

The possessive form is more usual with person-denoting “objects,” and is obligatory for personal pronoun “objects”—**his murder, their arrest, our education**.

Make an abstract noun phrase out of the words in parentheses. Use an **of** phrase “object” and begin the phrase with **the**.

EXAMPLE: a. (employ, highly qualified workers) has greatly increased their production.
 The employment of highly qualified workers has greatly increased their production.

b. He hired an investment broker for (manage, his affairs).
 He hired an investment broker for the management of his affairs.

1. Many people have condemned (employ, slave labor).

2. Many civil disorders resulted from (assassinate, President).

3. (arrange, flowers) was very beautiful.

4. (punish, disobedient children) was very severe.

5. They were arrested for (possess, marijuana).

6. (separate, Church and State) is a principle recognized by the American Constitution.

7. Soon after (destroy, old temple), a new one was built in the same place.
-
8. Their teacher was explaining (pronounce, vowels, English).
-
9. (solve, problem) is to hire more men.
-
10. (apply, hot compresses) will reduce the swelling.
-
11. (seize, Bastille) was the beginning of the French Revolution.
-

9-4

"OBJECTS" IN ABSTRACT NOUN PHRASES (2)

Some original direct objects of finite verbs require prepositions other than *of* when they follow the abstract noun derived from the verb.

<i>for</i>	<i>after</i> demand, desire, pity, preference, request, respect, reverence, urge, wish
<i>to</i>	<i>after</i> address, answer, assistance, damage, injury, obedience, resemblance, resistance
<i>on</i>	<i>after</i> attack
<i>in</i>	<i>after</i> trust

Sometimes either *for* or *of* may precede a "direct object" in an abstract noun phrase—*her love for* or *of her mother*; *his admiration for* or *of Shakespeare*; *his hatred for* or *of all women*.

Change the words in parentheses into an abstract noun phrase. Use the correct preposition before the original direct object.

EXAMPLE: a. (he, prefer, only daughter) is very obvious.
His preference for his only daughter is very obvious.

b. (he, resemble, father) is very striking.
His resemblance to his father is very striking.

1. (damage, flooded area) was so great that the government is declaring it a disaster area.
-
-

2. (child, demand, constant attention) is a sign of great insecurity on her part.

3. The landlord ignored (tenants, request, more heat).

4. (he, answer, questions) were not entirely satisfactory to the grand jury.

5. (they, attack, enemy positions) was unsuccessful.

6. (he, pity, all stray animals) led him to donate money for an animal shelter.

7. He began to embezzle money from his clients in order to satisfy (he, desire, more and more, luxuries).

8. The reporter is checking with the hospital on the nature of (injury, victim of the car accident).

9. (she, admire, that painter) almost borders on idolatry.

10. Nothing can shake (he, trust, God).

11. The most important belief in Schweitzer's religion was (respect, all forms of life).

12. (The President, address, nation) will be broadcast tonight.

9-5

**SPECIAL "COMPLEMENTS" OF NOUNS
IN ABSTRACT NOUN PHRASES**

Prepositional phrases, infinitive phrases or **that** noun clauses that normally follow verbs or adjectives may also follow the nouns derived from such words.

Prepositional phrases	He atoned for his sins <i>becomes</i> his atonement for his sins
Infinitive phrases	He decided to take a trip <i>becomes</i> his decision to take a trip
That noun clauses	He suggested that we see a lawyer <i>becomes</i> his suggestion that we see a lawyer

Form an abstract noun phrase from the words in parentheses. Be sure to use the proper "complement."

EXAMPLE: a. (Mr. Jones, persists, his work) will one day bring its own reward.

Mr. Jones' persistence in his work will one day bring its own reward.

b. No one could understand (he, refuse, accept, award).

No one could understand his refusal to accept the award.

c. (he, pretend, he, have, no money) is utterly ridiculous.

His pretense that he has no money is utterly ridiculous.

1. The foreign student was complimented on (he, was, familiar, English language.)

2. (rebels, plotted, take over, political power) was thwarted by the government.

3. He has never broken (he, resolve, not, drink, liquor)

4. (he, was, aware, Mrs. Brown, not like, he) made him uncomfortable in her presence.

5. (Columbus, assume, world, be, round) has been proved correct.

6. He was overjoyed by (his company, decided, transfer, he, South America).

7. He was saddened by (he, realize, he, soon, lose, she (omit the first he)).

8. (he, aspired, high position) makes him anxious to know the right people.

9. (he, announce, he, will run, for governor) pleased many of his friends.

10. (marriage counselor, attempt, reconcile, couple) produced no result at all.

11. (residents, complained, they, not have, enough, police protection) was referred to the Chief of Police.

12. When (she, long, her husband) became very great, she called him up long distance.

13. (athlete, was, certain, he, always, win) made him very arrogant.

14. I can understand (a stranger, is, amazed, the size of New York).

15. (they, are, aware, their mistake) will help them to correct it.

16. (the generals, conspired, overthrow, government) was discovered just in time.

9-6

ADJECTIVES-FROM-ADVERBS IN ABSTRACT NOUN PHRASES

-Ly adverbs are changed to adjectives in abstract noun phrases. These -ly adverbs appear originally as modifiers of verbs or predicate adjectives.

They interrupted his speech *continually* becomes
 Their *continual* interruption of his speech.
 (compare with the gerund phrase their *continual* interrupting of his speech)
 He is *extremely* selfish becomes his *extreme* selfishness.

Very before a predicate adjective, and **very much** before a verb usually become the adjective **great** before abstract nouns.

She is *very* generous becomes her *great* generosity.
 He loved his children *very much* becomes his *great* love for his children.

Very before other adverbs remains unchanged in abstract noun phrases—**He was promoted very rapidly** becomes his *very rapid* promotion.

Form an abstract noun phrase from the words in parentheses. Be careful of the change in form from adverbs to adjectives.

EXAMPLE: a. (the accountant, checked, figures, carefully) revealed several discrepancies.

The accountant's careful check of the figures revealed several discrepancies.

b. We couldn't help noticing (she, resembled, her sister, very much).

We couldn't help noticing her great resemblance to her sister.

c. The doctors are not able to diagnose (he, has been, ill, recently).

The doctors are not able to diagnose his recent illness.

1. (he, replied, sharply, her question) hurt her very much.

2. In this state, there is (officials, are elected, annually).

3. (he, was, very successful) has made him very arrogant.

4. (patient, recovered, quickly) surprised even the doctors.

5. The customs officials are requiring (baggage, be inspected, more thoroughly).

6. Because of (she, was, very indignant, his remark), she refused to speak to him again.

7. (they, attended, theater, frequently) has been noticed by some of the actors.

8. (child, was, very curious, his new neighbors) led him to ask some impolite questions.

9. (company, arrived, unexpectedly) disconcerted the hostess.

10. The poor widow thanked him for (he, was, extremely, generous).

11. Our visitors praised (our son, behaved, well).

12. (prices, increased, sharply) will lead to (higher wages, will be demanded, inevitably).

9-7

ABSTRACT NOUN PHRASES AS ALTERNATIVES FOR DEPENDENT CLAUSES

The abstract noun phrase may be the equivalent of a noun clause or an adverbial clause.

That her husband failed to keep his word disturbed her very much.
or *Her husband's failure to keep his word* disturbed her very much.

After the Allies defeated the Germans in the First World War,
a peace treaty was signed at Versailles.
or *After the Allies' defeat of the Germans in the First World War,*
a peace treaty was signed at Versailles.

Since the abstract noun phrase may have either active or passive meaning, this second clause may also take the form of—*After the defeat of the Germans by the Allies in the First World War.*

Change the underlined clauses to abstract noun phrases.

EXAMPLE: a. After she was divorced from her husband, she went on a long trip.

After her divorce from her husband, she went on a long trip.

b. I doubt that the letter is completely accurate.

I doubt the complete accuracy of the letter.

1. Before the incandescent lamp was invented by Edison, gas was used to light the homes and streets.

2. He promised that the prisoners would be quickly released.

3. Although he was absent from school, the sick boy was able to do all his assignments.

4. Until they were rescued at sea, the men took turns in rowing the boat.

5. In 1776 the American colonies proclaimed that they were independent.

6. Since her husband died, she has been very moody and depressed.

7. He complained that he had been harshly criticized by his employer. (use **about** with the abstract noun phrase)

8. The boy was fired because he was inefficient.

9. It was late in the evening before she noticed that she had lost an earring.

10. Although his doctor had warned him, he still continued to smoke.

11. *Because someone discovered gold in California in 1848, many people rushed there hoping to get rich quick.*

12. *Although the building had been condemned by the health authorities, people continued to live in it.*

13. *Because the defendant refused to answer some of the questions in court, some people felt that he was guilty.*

9-8

REVIEW OF ABSTRACT NOUN PHRASES

In each set of sentences, replace the word **this** with an abstract noun phrase formed from the other sentence.

Abstract Noun Phrase as Subject

1. The doctor arrived quickly.
This saved the patient's life.

2. He loved his wife passionately.
This caused him to put up with her nagging habits.

3. John was unexpectedly dismissed by his company.
This disappointed him very much.

4. Bob was very ambitious to get ahead.
This was the subject of much discussion.

Abstract Noun Phrase as Object of Verb

5. The doctor arrived quickly.
I appreciated *this*.

6. He loved his wife passionately.
Everyone could understand *this*.
-

7. John was unexpectedly dismissed by his company.
The union committee is investigating *this*.
-

8. Bob was very ambitious to get ahead.
His wife discussed *this*.
-

**Abstract Noun Phrase
as Object of Preposition**

9. The doctor arrived quickly.
We were grateful for *this*.
-

10. He loved his wife passionately.
We talked about *this*.
-

11. John was unexpectedly dismissed by his company.
We were surprised at *this*.
-

12. Bob was very ambitious to get ahead.
His friends worried about *this*.
-

**Abstract Noun Phrase
as Subjective Complement**

13. What saved the patient's life was *this*.
The doctor arrived quickly.
-

**Abstract Noun Phrase
as Appositive**

14. I can't understand one thing—*this*.
John was unexpectedly dismissed by his company.
-

9-9
USING ABSTRACT NOUN PHRASES
FOR SUMMARIZING

Study the following paragraphs carefully. Underline the parts of each paragraph that are required for completing the summary sentence. Use your own words as much as possible. (Do *not* write more than one sentence for each paragraph.)

The methods of tutoring a single pupil or a small group vary as widely as subjects and individuals. But the principle is nearly always the same. The pupil prepares a body of work by himself. He takes it for criticism and correction to the tutor, who then goes over it with the greatest possible thoroughness, criticizing everything from the general conception to the tiniest detail. The pupil learns from three different activities: first, from doing his own work alone; second, from observing the mistakes he has missed, and also from defending himself on points where he believes he is right; third, from looking over the completed and corrected work and comparing it with the original assignment and his first draft. The first of these is the work of creation, the second is criticism, the third is appreciation of wholeness. It is the tutor's main task to see that the individual activities are not really separate: they must mesh together and work into a larger scheme, covering as much of the subject as the pupil needs.

Gilbert Highet, *The Art of Teaching*, 1950.¹

Summary sentence—In the tutorial system, the student learns from three different activities: the _____, the _____, and the _____.

Existentialism gets its name from an insistence that human life is understandable only in terms of an individual man's existence, his particular experience of life. It says that a man *lives* (has existence) rather than *is* (has being or essence), and that every man's experience of life is unique, radically different from everyone else's and can be understood truly only in terms of his involvement in life or commitment to it. . . . It asks the question of Job and St. Augustine, "*Who am I?*" with its suggestion of the uniqueness and mystery of each human life and its emphasis upon the subjective or personal rather than the objective or impersonal. From the outside a man appears to be just another natural creature: from the inside he is an entire universe, the center of infinity. . . .

Gordon E. Bigelow, "A Primer of Existentialism," *College English*.²

summary sentence—Essential to existential thought is the assumption that _____

¹Gilbert Highet, *The Art of Teaching*, copyright 1950. Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

²Gordon E. Bigelow, "A Primer of Existentialism," *College English*, December 1961. Reprinted with the permission of the National Council of Teachers of English.

