

Empty Nouns and Dead Verbs

1. Identifying empty nouns and dead verbs
2. Revising methods

Empty Nouns

(* most over used)

amount

*area

*aspect

attitude

basis

*case

degree

experience

*fact

factor

*fashion

*feeling

field

*level

*manner

means

*nature

order

part

period

picture

*process

rate

realm

respect

role

scope

situation

state

type

Identifying Empty Nouns

- 1) Empty noun list (I.D. – circle then remove)
- 2) An empty noun depends on another key word in the sentence for meaning, and often the key word is a noun or adjective that precedes the empty noun.

Original: *Injury to the heart may be of a temporary **nature**.*

Revision: *Injury to the heart may be temporary.*

- 3) Most empty nouns occur with a prepositional phrase using in, on or of. (See example above.)

Removing Empty Nouns

- 1) Drop the empty noun and clean up
- 2) Change an adjective to an adverb
- 3) Convert the significant noun following “of” into a modifier of another noun

Removing Empty Nouns

1) Drop the empty noun and clean up

O... We recommend a good writing course for students in the area of ecology.

R... We recommend a good writing course for students in ~~the area of~~ ecology.

Removing Empty Nouns

1) Drop the empty noun and clean up

O... Further studies are required in the applied aspects of ecology.

R... ???

Removing Empty Nouns

1) Drop the empty noun and clean up

O... Such strategies are especially evident in the case of terrestrial vertebrates.

R... ???

Removing Empty Nouns

1) Drop the empty noun and clean up

O... This study reveals the fact that nematodes are important consumers in short-grass prairies.

R... ???

Removing Empty Nouns

1) Drop the empty noun and clean up

O... This study deals with the primary consumer level.

R... ???

Removing Empty Nouns

1) Drop the empty noun and clean up

O... Injury to the heart may be of a temporary nature.

R... ???

Removing Empty Nouns

2) Change an adjective to an adverb

O... This conclusion seems to have been drawn in an arbitrary fashion.

R... This conclusion seems to have been drawn arbitrarily.

Removing Empty Nouns

2) Change an adjective to an adverb

O... Most ecologists make their living in an honest manner.

R... ???

Removing Empty Nouns

2) Convert the significant noun following “of” into a modifier of another noun

O... We recommend a good writing course for students in the area of ecology.

R... We recommend a good writing course for ecology students.

Dead Verbs

(* most over used)

accomplish

achieve

*be

bring (about)

*cause

do

exercise

*give

*have

*make

occur

provide

result

serve

take (place)

Identifying Dead Verbs

- 1) Dead verb list (I.D. – circle then remove)
- 2) Most dead verbs depend on an other word in the sentence for the “verb” meaning in the sentence.
- 3) Often the word with the hidden “verb” meaning is a noun ending in -sion, -tion, -ance, -ence, -ment or similar endings. These nouns are converted from a verb by adding the ending – i.e., “nouncing a verb.”

Examples:

discussion – discuss

reduction – reduce

tolerance -- tolerate

difference – differ

management – manage

Removing Dead Verbs

- 1) Dead verb list (I.D. – circle then remove)
- 2) Sometimes just **drop it** from the sentence with a few or no other changes. This method applies almost solely to “to be.”
- 3) Sometimes **replace it with the verb form of a noun** that is already in the sentence. This may require some drastic changes to the sentence.

Removing Dead Verbs

1) Just **drop it** from the sentence with a few or no other changes. This method applies almost solely to “to be.” (Also note that you will often get rid of an empty noun.)

O... The third type of rock **is** the type that is called metamorphic.

R... The third type of rock ~~is the type that is~~ called metamorphic.

Removing Dead Verbs

1) Just **drop it** from the sentence with a few or no other changes. This method applies almost solely to “to be.” (Also note that you will often get rid of an empty noun.)

O... There are several features of this idea that merit comment.

R... ~~There are~~ Several features of this idea ~~that~~ merit comment.

Removing Dead Verbs

2) Sometimes **replace it with the verb form of a noun** that is already in the sentence. This often works well for the 5 dead verbs that hurt clarity the most: **be, have, give, cause,** and **make.**

O... There is a possibility that this process will be useful in our own program.

R... ???

Removing Dead Verbs

2) Sometimes **replace it with the verb form of a noun** that is already in the sentence. This often works well for the 5 dead verbs that hurt clarity the most: **be, have, give, cause,** and **make.**

O... This tradition has a strong influence on behavior.

R... This tradition strongly influences behavior.

Removing Dead Verbs

2) Sometimes **replace it with the verb form of a noun** that is already in the sentence. This often works well for the 5 dead verbs that hurt clarity the most: **be, have, give, cause,** and **make.**

O... Scientists also gave careful **consideration** to the working atmosphere.

R... ???

Removing Dead Verbs

2) Sometimes **replace it with the verb form of a noun** that is already in the sentence. This often works well for the 5 dead verbs that hurt clarity the most: **be, have, give, cause,** and **make**.

O... Rats have an ability to make selections of healthful food.

R... ???

Removing Dead Verbs

2) Sometimes **replace it with the verb form of a noun** that is already in the sentence. Watch for nouns ending in -sion, -tion, -ance, -ence, -ment or similar endings.

O... Shading of apple trees **caused** an increase in leaf area, reduction in leaf thickness, and intensified the green color.

R... ???