

# **The way language condenses and generalises information**

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## (a) Nominalisation

Nominalisation changes verbs and other words into nouns. It makes a text more compact and "written", e.g., instead of saying "When your body reaches an abnormally low temperature, you will need to be taken to hospital", we can use nominalisations: "Hypothermia requires hospitalisation." Instead of saying "How farmers protected their livestock from the storm was the topic of the article", we can use nominalisation: "Livestock protection was the topic of the article." Changing a verb into a noun requires adding a suffix to the verb:

| Verb      | + suffix | Noun (these examples are all abstract) |
|-----------|----------|--|
| break     | -age     | breakage                               |
| explore   | -        | exploration                            |
| supervise | (a)tion  | supervision                            |
| farm      | -ion     | farming                                |
| star      | -ing     | stardom                                |
| refuse    | -dom     | refusal                                |
| amaze     | -al      | amazement                              |
|           | -ment    |  |

## Nominalisation as a source of difficulty in comprehension

Because nominalisation packs more information into the theme position, students need to process more ideas per clause. It also often makes concrete processes more abstract, or generalises experience, e.g., "Water and wind erode rock" is nominalised as "Erosion occurs when rocks are ground down by water and wind." Students will need to learn how to unpack this kind of condensed language.

## (b) Ellipsis

Ellipsis occurs when part of a sentence is left out because it would otherwise repeat what is said elsewhere. The understanding and use of ellipsis increases with maturity and language use. In, "I'd like to eat that biscuit, but I won't", the second clause is elliptical, with "eat that biscuit" being omitted. In "Read the first paragraph, then the questions", the second clause is elliptical, with "read" being omitted. People usually find the full form of such sentences unnecessary or irritating, and use ellipsis to achieve a more acceptable economy of statement.

Ellipsis is particularly common in conversation:

- A: Where are you going?
  - B: To the shops. (i.e., I'm going to the shops)
  - A: Why? (i.e., Why are you going to the shops?)
  - B: To get some bread. (i.e., I'm going to the shops to get some bread)
  - A: Is John going with you? (i.e., Is John going with you to the shops to get some bread?)
- (Crystal, 2003, p.228)

## Ellipsis as a source of difficulty in comprehension

Students will need to know that they will be able to find out what has been omitted by referring back to the words in the first clause. However, successfully doing this is dependent on the student having at least an intuitive understanding of English grammar.

