Clarity (from Williams, *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*)

**Compare these sentences and decide which is clearer:**

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 backgrounds influence the way children learn.

What was the subject of 1a? The main verb?

What was the subject of 1b? The main verb?

**Now do the same with these two:**

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.

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

For each sentence, what were the subjects of dependent and independent clauses? Verbs of those clauses?

**Read 3a and identify WHO is doing WHAT in each clause. Rewrite to reflect that “who” as the subject of each clause and that “what” as the verb of each clause.**

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

3b.

**Key Term: Nominalization**

A Nominalization is a word that is noun which hides an action or a description. For example, “evaluation” has the action “evaluate” hidden in it, and “difference” hides the adjective “different.”

Which sounds better?

4a. We made an evaluation of the scores and discovered a difference between the classes.

4b. We evaluated the scores and discovered the classes were different.

Note: Actions can also hide in adjectives. For example, “Itchy skin is **typical** of scabies,” can be revised as “Itchy skin typifies scabies.”

Change these nouns to verbs or adjectives:

Discussion Expression Analysis Accuracy Improvement Belief Failure

Clarity Suggestion Rationalization Investigation Approach Thoroughness

Aggression Intelligence Intention Loss Confusion Need

Revise these sentences for Clarity:

First, ask, “Who is doing something?” and “What are they doing?” Change subjects and verbs accordingly. To help, find nouns that could be verbs or adjectives and change them as needed.

1. Lincoln’s hope was for the peaceful preservation of the Union, but the South’s attack on Fort Sumter made war an inevitability.
2. There were predictions by business executives that the economy would experience a quick revival.
3. The agreement by the class on the reading list was based on the assumption that there would be tests on only certain selections.
4. An understanding as to the need for controls over drinking on campus was recognized by fraternities.
5. Thorough physical conditioning of the team is the responsibility of the coaching staff.