

What forms of nominalization can fill the subject position?
The choice is wide:

John's death surprised me.
That he died surprised me.
His having died surprised me.

Other containers are much more restrictive. Take
. . . occurred at noon.

Here *John's death* is acceptable:

John's death occurred at noon.

But not the other two:

*That he died occurred at noon.
*His having died occurred at noon.

Now take the two adjectival containers

(1) . . . is unlikely
(2) . . . is sloppy.

Then form two different nominalizations from the sentence

John plays poker.

That is:

(3) John's playing poker
(4) John's playing of poker.

Clearly, (3) fits into (1) and (4) into (2) without any trouble:

John's playing poker is unlikely.
John's playing of poker is sloppy.

(2) will definitely reject (3):

*John's playing poker is sloppy.

And even (1) will only reluctantly admit (4):

?John's playing of poker is unlikely.

One more example. The container

I mentioned . . .

is more tolerant than the container

I think . . .

The former admits both of the following:

I mentioned that John died.
I mentioned John's death.

The latter takes only the first form:

I think that John died.
*I think John's death.

5.4. The considerations given in the previous section determine the strategy I shall follow. First of all I shall review the various forms that nominalized sentences (henceforth called "nominals") can take and shall try to find some ordering principle among them. Then I shall investigate the restrictions governing the compatibility of certain kinds of nominals with certain container contexts, hoping to end with a double result: classes of nominals corresponding to classes of containers. The tactical steps to be taken in this second task are marked out by the possible forms containers can have. Roughly speaking, a container pairs a nominal with a noun or with an adjective or with a verb. For example, each of the following sentences:

It is a *fact* that John died
His death was the *result* of an accident
The collapse of the Germans was a gradual *process*