Activity 11.2: Avoiding nominalised sentences

The language in all of the following sentences is unnecessarily complex and heavy, and some of the sentences are grammatically incorrect. Rewrite them in clear, correct English, avoiding nominalisation, but retaining all the ideas included in them:

1 Nominalised sentence: The two companies reached an agreement to undertake a collaboration on the project.
A clearer, stronger version: The two companies agreed to collaborate on the project.

2 Nominalised sentence: Melissa experienced a sense of devastation at her dismissal from her position with the company.
A clearer, stronger version: Melissa felt devastated when she was dismissed from the company.

3 Nominalised sentence: The overseas visitors felt excitement at the wildflowers because of their abundance and their intense colouration.
A clearer, stronger version: The overseas visitors were excited by the abundant and intensely coloured wildflowers.

4 Nominalised sentence: The mountaineer felt an enormous terror as her awareness grew of the dislodgement of the boulders on the summit above her.
A clearer, stronger version: The mountaineer was extremely (or enormously) terrified as she became aware that the boulders had dislodged on the summit above her.

5 Nominalised sentence: Feeling a desire to create a good impression on his supervisor, the young architecture student rushed his drawings and forgot to provide an indication of the depth of insulation required in the ceiling.
A clearer, stronger version: Wanting (or desiring) to impress his supervisor, the young architecture student rushed his drawings and forgot to indicate the depth of insulation required in the ceiling. (You could retain the phrase ‘depth of insulation’ here as it relates to specific building material.)

6 Nominalised sentence: She reached an appreciation of the value of simple, clear English, as she followed a slow progression through the activity.
A clearer, stronger version: She began to appreciate the value of simple, clear English, as she progressed slowly through the activity.

7 Nominalised sentence: So great was the young girl’s fury at her father’s refusal to buy her some chocolate that there was no hesitation in throwing herself on the ground and emitting a scream.
A clearer, stronger version: The young girl was so furious that (or when) her father refused to buy her some chocolate that she didn’t hesitate to throw herself on the ground and scream.
8 Nominalised sentence: Because of his strong commitment to the concept of sustainable architecture, the new graduate experienced a great deal of difficulty in exhibiting patience with some of the other architects in his office.

A clearer, stronger version: Because he was strongly committed to the concept of sustainable architecture, the new graduate found it very difficult to be patient with some of the other architects in his office. (You could rephrase the last clause of this sentence to make it even stronger – the new graduate struggled to be patient with …)

9 Nominalised sentence: The IT executive turned the blame onto his young assistant, feeling a disturbance at the complexity of the problem.

A clearer, stronger version: The IT executive, feeling disturbed because the problem was very complex, blamed his young assistant. (If you reorder the clauses in this sentence, the sentence becomes both clearer and stronger.)

10 Nominalised sentence: After providing an agreement to be an investigator on this project, the development of my understanding grew rapidly.

A clearer, stronger version: After I had agreed to be an investigator on this project, I began to understand it rapidly.

In this example, the nominalised sentence is grammatically incorrect – it is an example of a dangling modifier. We explain this problem on page 190 of the book. Grammatical errors like dangling modifiers are more likely to creep into nominalised sentences than into the stronger verbalised versions.