

## AMA Manual of Style

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### Nouns

Stacy Christiansen

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Nouns (words that name a person, place, thing, or idea) may serve as subjects or objects. Although in English nouns can be used as modifiers, overuse of noun modifiers can lead to a lack of clarity. Purists may demand stricter rules on usage, but, as with the use of nouns as verbs (see , Correct and Preferred Usage, Back-formations), the process of linguistic change is inevitable, and grammatical rigor must be tempered by judgment and common sense. In *The Careful Writer*, Bernstein advises the use of no more than 2 polysyllabic noun modifiers per noun for the sake of clarity. However, long

### Modifiers (Noun Strings)

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Although in English nouns can be used as modifiers, overuse of noun modifiers can lead to a lack of clarity. Purists may demand stricter rules on usage, but, as with the use of nouns as verbs (see , Correct and Preferred Usage, Back-formations), the process of linguistic change is inevitable, and grammatical rigor must be tempered by judgment and common sense. In *The Careful Writer*, Bernstein advises the use of no more than 2 polysyllabic noun modifiers per noun for the sake of clarity. However, long noun strings are sometimes difficult to avoid. If several of the attributive nouns are read

### Subject-Complement Agreement

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Subjects and complements should agree in number. The child can take off his own shoes. We asked trial participants to return their pill dispensers. However, when the complement is shared by all constituents of the plural subject, it remains singular. The authors were asked

to revise their paper. All study sites obtained approval from their institutional review board. Investigators inserted a catheter into the study participants' pulmonary artery.

## Modifying Gerunds

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When a noun or pronoun precedes a gerund (a verb form ending in -ing that is used as a noun), the noun or pronoun is possessive. (See also , Punctuation, Apostrophe.)The toxicity of the drug was not a factor in the patient's dying so suddenly. The award recognized the researcher's planning as well as his performance.Present participles (used adjectivally) should not be confused with gerunds. In the sentence below, the objective case (them) is correct.I watched them gathering in the auditorium.If the possessive their were used instead of the objective them, the emphasis would be on the action (gathering).