

VIVA VOCABULARY!

Practical Ways to
Promote Word
Consciousness

By Lois E. Huffman, Ph.D.

Each edition of “Viva Vocabulary!” focuses on different word genres. The goal is to help students (re)discover the joy of language and the expressive power of vocabulary.

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Verbification and Nounification: Changing the Part of Speech to Form New Words

Have you been verbed? Do you verbify? My guess is that your answer to at least one of those questions is yes.

Verbification (a.k.a. verbing) is using a noun, an adjective, or other word or phrase as a verb. The following internet meme includes four verbified nouns: “I don’t want to *adult* today. I don’t even want to *human*. I want to *dog* (or *cat*).” (Thanks, Bethany! Italics are mine.)

“The purpose of verbing is to make what we say immediate and to-the-point... To some, verbing makes what you say sound fresher and less traditional. To others, it’s akin to workplace-appropriate slang.” (Grammarly.com) Although verbification has been happening throughout history, today it’s all but impossible to go a day without hearing or reading several recently verbed words.

Verbing is the most common type of word **conversion**, one of the processes by which words are formed in English. **Nounification**, which will also be discussed in this article, is another type of word conversion. (Conversion was briefly addressed in Part [Three](#) of the Viva Vocabulary! series, “New Words: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow?”) Below are even more ways to explore verbification and nounification with your students.

At the end of this article, you will find many more examples of verbed words that my friends and family and I have collected. Please note that some verbifications may not be appropriate for young people. And, as in all Viva Vocabulary! articles, inclusion does not imply endorsement of the language or behavior.

Verbification Teaching Ideas:

1. Remind the class what verbification is by showing the classic Calvin and Hobbes’ strip that deals with the phenomenon. Here’s the dialogue in the cartoon:

Calvin: “I like to verb words.”

Hobbs: “What?”

Calvin: "I take nouns and adjectives and use them as words. Remember when 'access' was a thing? Now it's something you do. It got verbed."

Hobbes: "Verbing weirds language."

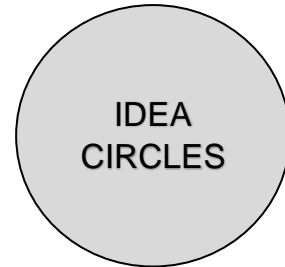
Calvin: "Maybe we can eventually make language a complete impediment to understanding." (aplanguag2007.wikispaces.com)

Ask students to share any school-appropriate verbed words they've recently encountered. If more examples are needed, draw on the lists found at the end of this piece.

2. Implement the Idea Circles discussion strategy* (Guthrie and McCann, 1996; Vacca, Vacca, and Mraz, 2017) through video chat or an asynchronous discussion forum to help older students explore verbification.

To prepare for the activity, locate several accessible articles about verbification. The three articles you select for the circles should offer different information and have different readability levels. Here are a few possibilities:

- ["Verbing Weirds Language: When Nouns Become Verbs"](#) by Brian Wasko
- ["The Definition of Verbing in Grammar"](#) by Richard Nordquist
- ["You've Been Verbed"](#) by Anthony Gardner



Form mixed-ability groups of three students and assign a different article to each member of a circle. After reading, students should share facts and information with their group members. Students might use a notetaking guide like this one to capture ideas from their article along with information from their group members.

Title of Article: _____		
Read by: _____		Date: _____
ASPECT	INFORMATION FROM ARTICLE I READ	INFORMATION FROM DISCUSSION WITH PEERS
Examples of verbification - recent ones and old standbys		
How long has verbing been going on (History)		
"Rules" for verbing (Why some words are verbed and others aren't)		
Pros: Reasons to LOVE verbification		
Cons: Reasons to LOATHE verbification		

To culminate the activity, have students create a digital poster, video, infographic, mind map, or podcast to show their new learning.

*This content reading strategy helps students synthesize information from multiple sources and is effective at the middle or end of a unit of study.

3. Encourage students to collect verbed words from TV, social media, songs, conversations, and digital or print materials. Students can post their finds on [Padlet.com](https://padlet.com) or your class site. If desired, form teams and turn this activity into a friendly competition with the goal of finding the most verbed words.

As a class, set rules and conditions, such as the following:

- All finds must be documented with a photo, screenshot, video snippet, audio clip, or the speaker’s signature.
- Demographic information about the speaker or writer should also be noted.
- Verbed words cannot be taken from others’ collections or online explications on the topic, such as a Wikipedia article or blog post on verbing.

Conclude the competition by discussing any unfamiliar terms and taking a closer look at the words that have been verbed, including their contexts of use. Are there patterns? Encourage students to consider the age and background of the speakers or writers as well as their geographic location.

4. Set up a virtual chat and invite students to brainstorm body parts that have been verbed. Share several examples to inspire students: *head* a committee; *nose* around for news or into someone else’s business; and *strong-arm* an opponent. Here are more that students might generate:

<p><i>head</i> home/for the hills <i>mind</i> your own business <i>scalp</i> a ticket <i>brain</i> someone or oneself (hit on the head) <i>face</i> each other <i>eye</i> a seat <i>mouth</i> a greeting/some words <i>shoulder</i> the responsibility/blame <i>arm</i> yourself <i>elbow</i> someone out of your way <i>hand</i> it someone for working hard or doing a good job <i>hand</i> someone an object/power/resignation <i>palm</i> a ball (or something else) <i>finger</i> a suspect <i>knuckle</i> down (try harder)</p>	<p><i>thumb</i> a ride <i>muscle</i> in on territory <i>bone</i> a chicken or turkey (de-bone it) <i>heart</i> a person, place, or thing <i>pore</i> over a book <i>skin</i> an unlucky animal or external body part such as a knee or elbow <i>back</i> something or someone <i>stomach</i> a gruesome sight or story/loss <i>gut</i> a building (burn out)/person or animal (disembowel) <i>leg</i> it (run away) <i>hamstring</i> (thwart) someone <i>knee</i> someone (hit with the knee) <i>toe</i> the line <i>hoof</i> it (walk) <i>foot</i> the bill</p>
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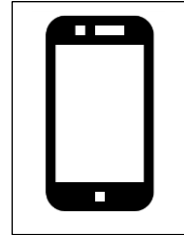
(Adapted from: proper-english-foundation.yolasite.com)

Next, have students reflect on their lists by responding to questions such as:

- Which of the verbifications are part of idioms?
- Which incorporate words with multiple meanings?
- Which expressions are of recent vintage?

(Refer to the previous Viva Vocabulary! post on [“Idio\(ma\)tic Expressions: Go Figure!”](#) for more information on idioms.)

5. Have students consider the associations people may have with certain verbed words. Which words are perceived negatively? Which are viewed positively? Which are considered quaint or dated as opposed to hip and modern? For instance, I’ve heard *doctor* (as in to treat an injury or health problem) used in folksy contexts. In contrast, *texting* (i.e., sending a short message via a digital device) has a contemporary association.



6. Invite students to find out when the verbed words they hear in popular songs or everyday speech were first verbified. Students might be surprised to learn that some of the words have been used as verbs for many years. To wit, “*disrespect* as a verb first appeared in print around 1614—four centuries ago.” (grammarbook.com/) One list showing when some common words were verbed (or nouned) is at macmillandictionaryblog.com. (More information on nouning is below in item 10.)
7. Encourage students to take a closer look at verbed words that end with *-ing*, such as these terms from the list at the end of this article: *debting, fisting, gymming, keying, laddering, platforming, spidering, and spring breaking*. In her post “[2014 Word of the Year](#),” Mignon Fogarty (a.k.a. Grammar Girl) discusses the word, *adulting* and other words that have been verbed through the addition of *-ing*. After students read the piece, have them reflect on the modern use of *-ing* in verbification (e.g., *solutioning, actioning*)
8. Let the class know that the suffixes *-ize* and *-ate* are also used to verb nouns, as in *actionize* and “Can this skirt be *pocketized*?” -Erin McKean. Although these new words are easy to pronounce and understand, sometimes verbification of this kind leads to “discordant, perfectly awful” neologisms such as *tangibilitate* ([The World and Everything in It podcast](#)). Ask students to note other verbed nouns with *-ize* and *-ate* that fall into this latter category.
9. Remind students that **eponyms** are based on the name of a real or fictitious person. (See Part [Two](#) of the Viva Vocabulary! post “Jack and Jill Can Be Even More *Nym-ble*.” for more information on eponyms.) Provide examples of verbed words that are also eponyms:
- to *Hillary* - to sweep something under the rug or pretend it didn’t occur or doesn’t exist (urbandictionary.com) or to hold a candidate to a higher standard for arbitrary or sexist reasons The latter meaning was evident during a [town hall meeting in 2019](#) when Massachusetts senator Elizabeth Warren was asked if she’d be

Hillaried in the presidential race. *Hillary* refers to Hillary Rodham Clinton, who was a U.S. presidential candidate in 2016.

- *Jolie* the leg - to extend one's leg out (Actor Angelina Jolie juttied her right leg through a thigh-high slit in the evening gown she wore at the 2012 Academy Awards. The move was spoofed by many, including Betty White's character on the TV show *HOT in Cleveland*.)

- *Kondo* something (as in "I *Kondooed* my cleaning supplies." - Shifrah Combiths on the *Apartment Therapy* blog) - to purge items that do not "spark joy" (Decluttering and organization are promoted by Marie Kondo in her books *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* and *Spark Joy: An Illustrated Master Class on the Art of Organizing and Tidying Up*.)



- *MacGyver* it - to solve a problem in an ingenious way, using only immediately available tools and common household items ([onlineslang dictionary.com](http://onlineslangdictionary.com)) (Students might be interested in the BBC.com article "[How 'MacGyver' Became a Verb.](#)" Angus MacGyver was a character on the TV show *MacGyver*, which aired from the late 1980s through the early 1990s. A remake of *MacGyver* premiered in 2016.)

Next, have older students read *The New York Times'* piece "[Mutant Verbs.](#)" Then discuss why **most proper noun verbifications don't seem to have staying power**. Share additional verbed proper nouns and ask students which ones they're familiar with. It's likely that many will be unknown to students because the word is no longer in common use or its namesake has faded into obscurity. (This may already be the case for the examples presented above.)

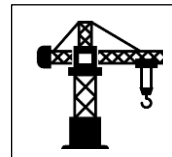
10. Inform the class that according to the [AngrySubEditor blog](#), the trend in English to blur the distinction between word types can be summed up by the maxim "There is no noun that cannot be verbed." Ask students whether they agree or disagree with this statement and to offer evidence from their experience and online research to support their position.
11. Also bring up **nounification** (a.k.a. nouning, nominalization), the conversion of verbs, adjectives, or adverbs to nouns (en.wikipedia.org). As Janks states in Dixon, Ferreira, Granville, and Newfield (2014), "Nouning turns actions into things. It focuses on the result of the action, the state of affairs produced by the action." "An archeological *dig*, a witch *hunt*, and a clam *bake* are examples of a verb repurposed as a noun." (blog.kenperlin.com/?p=12495)

Although nouning is not new, the phenomenon appears to be growing in popularity. The web article "[At the World Bank, A Shortage of Concrete \(Language\)](#)" discusses the nounification seen in World Bank reports in recent years: "Linguists argue that this converts specific actions taken by individuals into 'abstract objects.' People and countries no longer 'cooperate;' now there is just 'cooperation.'"

Share contemporary nounced words, such as these:

NOMINALIZATION	MEANING	SENTENCE SHOWING USAGE
<i>brag</i>	boast	"This is not a <i>brag</i>" -Kristen Bell in a Fossil commercial
<i>build</i>	construction	When is the <i>build</i> scheduled to start?
<i>groom</i>	neat appearance	"I got my <i>groom</i> back" -Brent Favre in an advertisement for MicroTouch
<i>old</i>	older person	If I hire an <i>old</i> as an intern, it will finally get Chuck off my back.
<i>overwhelm</i>	anxiety about massiveness of task	"Get your hands around your <i>overwhelm</i> by taking a step back and getting the big picture." - Stever Robbins, Get-It-Done Guy
<i>spend</i>	amount spent	The estimated <i>spend</i> for the period is \$20,000.
<i>takeaway</i> (Based on phrasal verb take away)	key point to remember	What's your <i>takeaway</i> from the workshop?

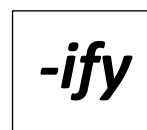
Then ask students to consider the pros and cons of nouned words. Author Greg Pendlebury maintains that nouncing makes writing "dull" and "hides meaning." In the opinion piece ["Those Irritating Verbs-As-Nouns"](#) from *The New York Times*, Henry Hitchings asserts that nouned words are "annoying" and "commonly regarded as slovenly, obfuscatory, pretentious, or merely ugly."



Clearly, not everyone is enamored with recently nouned words, but as Hitchings also suggests, there may be reasons for their use. Linguist [Arnold Zwicky](#) brings up some pros in his discussion of *fail* as a noun: "Why would anyone want the noun *fail* when the language already has the noun *failure*, with both mass and count uses? Well, as an innovation, it's noticeable, communicating creativity or playfulness, and possibly trendiness as well. And it's shorter than *failure*. Finally, the way I read examples of the nouncing *fail*, there's a suggestion of mistake or misstep that's not present in *failure*."

- Remind your students that some nouns are also used as adjectives, as in *basketball* game, *adult* education, and *women* leaders. Thus, it's probably no surprise to see *adult* as a descriptor in the sentence: "Framed art on the wall is the mark of a well-*adulted* home." ([Level Frames](#)) What is interesting is that *adult* was turned into a verb which was then turned into an adjective. Have students collect other modern-day verbed nouns that are now also used as adjectives.

- Although nouns are commonly verbed, adjectives can be verbed as well. This latter verbification is often accomplished with the addition of the suffix *-ify*, as in *false* → *falsify*. This conversion seems to be quite common today, but it often doesn't end there. The verb form is then converted to



a *-tion* noun, as in *falsification*. Here are additional examples of nouns and adjectives that have been verbed with *-ify*:

Adjective*	Verbed Form	Nouned Form
<i>blog</i>	<i>blogify</i>	<i>blogification</i>
<i>friend</i>	<i>friendify</i>	<i>friendification</i>
<i>green</i>	<i>greenify</i>	<i>greenification</i>
<i>healthy</i>	<i>healthify</i>	<i>healthification</i>

(Source: dailywritingtips.com) * Some of these are also used as nouns.

(More information on the *-ify* suffix is in Part [Two](#) of the “Roots and Affixes Doing Their Part” Viva Vocabulary! article.)

Have students consider which of these terms is likely to gain wide acceptance in our language. Draw on Allan Metcalf’s FUDGE Factors (2002) for predicting a word’s staying power:

- F**requency of use
- U**nobtrusiveness (i.e., word is easy to pronounce and doesn’t appear to be new)
- D**iversity of users and situations
- G**eneration of other forms and meanings
- E**ndurance of the concept

(The FUDGE Factors are also explained in Part [One](#) of the Viva Vocabulary! article “New Words: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow?”)

More Verbifications

Adjective or Common Noun → Verb (Italics added to highlight verbified words.)

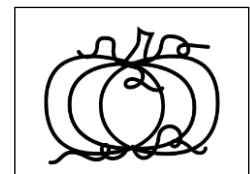
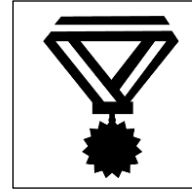
- “Yes, you can *architect* content and sites and commerce to get a click.” -Seth Godin
- “We *backgrounded* him.” -Tim McGee on TV show *NCIS*
- “You going to *badge* me?” -Character to agent on TV show *NCIS*; “I *badge* in to the office and head to my cubicle.” (Thanks, Linda!)
- “Yay for *batching* errands.” -*The Frugal Girl* (blog)
- “How do I find someone to *blurb* my book?” -Jeff Goins
- “Songs *bookended* his life.” -Fred Littleton
- “This was *booktalked* once in my classroom.” -Pernille Ripp
- “Did you follow him home? *Brick* him over the head?” -Sergeant Dan Scott on BBC TV series *Midsomer Murders*
- “Now I went and *buzzkilled* it for you, didn’t I?” -NPR *Marketplace*
- “At the end of the day, I *cabbed* home.” (Thanks, Boyd!)
- “*Caption* your way to extra cash.” -*Woman’s World*
- “Don’t Mind If We *Carb*,” -Episode of TV show *The Chew*



- “More problems come from an activity not *calendared* than from one written down in a messy way.” -FlyLady
- “*Cateye* with confidence.” -CoverGirl advertisement
- “Teens are being *catfished* into buying bad prom dresses.” -Yahoo headline
- “I have an idea. Let’s go *churching*.” -Jesse in movie *In-Lawfully Yours* (Thanks, Bree!)
- “*Coffee* me!” -Character on British TV show *Vexed* (Thanks, Joan!)
- “Don’t *dart* angry.” -Special Agent Jack Sloane on TV show *NCIS*
- “Stop *debting*.” Everydaycheapskate.com (Thanks, Kari!)
- “You can’t *defellowship* your spouse.” -Nathan Adams
- “Come to my office and let’s *dialogue* about it.” -School administrator
- “If there is some left, could you *doggy-bag* it for me?” -Mayor in movie *The Hundred-Foot Journey*
- “I don’t know if you’ve had the opportunity to *fat* out of your clothes.” -Jim Gaffigan in *Noble Ape*
- “It’s so nice to see the two of you *fisting* again.” -Carol Pilbasian on TV show *Last Man on Earth*
- “12 Reasons Guys *Friendzone* Girls” -Gurl.com
- “It’s okay, Dad. We’ll just *garage* it.” -Character on Netflix show *The Meyerowitz Stories*
- “In LA, people think you should *ghost* out of a party.” -Elizabeth Craft on *Happier* podcast
- “People shouldn’t *guilt* you into helping, and in return, you shouldn’t *guilt* them into helping you later or feeling bad for asking for help.” -*Design Sponge* blog
- “I’ve been *gymming* to work on my hips.” -Reader comment on *The Fashion Police* blog (Thanks, Alli!)
- “She likes to *hammock*.” -Ree Drummond
- “The Walking Classroom really *happied* up our class.” -Ellery, 5th grader, MI
- “We can’t *helicopter* in.” -Jeb Bush (Thanks, Bailey!)
- “How to *Herb*” -Nicole Papantoniou (*Family Circle* article title)
- “*Hoop* it up!” -Garrett on TV show *Superstore*
- “They *hymned* their King in strains divine.” -“On Zion’s Glorious Summit” song
- “Are you guys getting *inked* or what?” -Character on TV show *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*
- “I gotta *jet*.” -Michael Weston on TV show *Burn Notice* (Thanks, Gloria!)
- “Okay! I will *karaoke* with you on the last night!” -Rachel in movie *Like Father*
- “Random guy caught *keying* a car” -YouTube (Thanks, Brandon!)
- “I feel like I have to do all these little things that aren’t really *laddering* up to what matters most to me.” -Tiffany Dufu
- “Get ready to *lesson plan*.” -Lily Jones
- “It was my province to *lowercase* ‘the interstate.’” -Mary Norris (Thanks, Carolyn!)
- “Do you like to *meal plan*? Have you ever *meal planned* or have you thought about doing it and never really have done it? -Becky Barnfather



- “Children grow, landscapes heal, runners *medal*,...” -Aubrey Johnson
- “If students don’t like it, we don’t menu it.” -Lauren Richards
- “I *nanny* in Cary.” -NCSU student (Thanks, Shonda!)
- “Before you *pillow* your head tonight, . . .” -Larry Fife
- “I am *platforming* her interest as a way of getting Stacy to see me in a new light.” -Angel Fred on TV show *Drop Dead Diva*
- “I write and *podcast*.” -Kendra on *The Simple Show* podcast
- “5 Ways to *Porch* (Even If You Don’t Have a Porch)” -Thekitchn.com
- “It doesn’t *potato chip* on you like plywood does.” -Carpenter on TV show *Man Caves*
- “We collect clothes. We process clothes. We *quality control*. We sort. We *size*. We *shelve*.” -Dallas Bonavita
- “Did you just *quote hands* ‘being single’ to us? -Jess Day on TV show *New Girl*
- “*Reshore* call centers to win customer loyalty.” -CustomerThink.com
- “He was killed while *spring breaking*.” -Jennifer Jareau on TV show *Criminal Minds*
- “The witness showed up and the killer *rabbited*.” -Laura Diamond on TV show *The Mysteries of Laura Diamond* (Thanks, Bonnie!)
- “I *roadtripped* down from Purdue.” -Character on TV show *The Middle*
- “A front-facing camera ‘so wide, you can *selfie*, with like, everyone.’” -Samsung commercial (Thanks, Paul!)
- “I *school* dudes half my age.” -Aetna advertisement
- “I’m not here to *shrink* you.” -Therapist on TV show *Kevin Probably Saves the World*
- The women’s team *silvered* at last year’s games.” (Thanks, Rob!)
- “The children...were *spidering* about on a ropes course.” (newyorker.com)
- “*STEAM* up your school.” -Advertisement for littleBits
- “Well, that would explain why he *suicided* in the school barn.” -Dan Scott on BBC TV series *Midsomer Murders*
- “What’s your plan for *sunsetting* the site?” -Seth Godin
- “U.S. spy chief considers revealing number of Americans *surveilled* online.” -NPR tweet
- “Have The Undertaker from WWE come out and *tombstone* a guy....” -Jimmy Fallon on the TV show *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*
- “I just *trailed* Splash (horse) on over.” -Character in movie *Texas Rein*
- “Geniuses at the Genius Bar are trained to use a manual and to *triage*, not to actually make things work better...” -Seth Godin
- “*Trick* your pumpkin.” -Roeshel Summerville
- “Come *TV* with us.” -Hulu advertisement (Thanks, Georgia!)
- “It’s time to *war* up.” -Emily Rhodes on TV show *Designated Survivor*; “Countries that trade don’t *war*.” -IA Sen. Chuck Grassley
- “So Michael researched and *wikied*...” -Narrator on TV show *Jane the Virgin*
- “*Wine* me. Hard. -Dr. Allison Park on TV show *Dr. Ken* (Thanks, Jayne!)



Proper Noun → Verb

- “I’m her cool uncle. We *Bitmoji*.” -Will Adams, brother of Elizabeth McCord on TV show *Madam Secretary*

- “We *Black Friday* in a big way.” -Home Depot TV commercial (Thanks, Bonnie!)
- “So, we had to *Craigslist* our couch before the big move.” -*Apartment Therapy* blog
- “*Easter* like you mean it.” -Walmart TV commercial
- “Now what? We’re one of these couples that just *FaceTimes* each other all the time?” -Dev Shah on Netflix show *Master of None*
- “I didn’t realize you were *FitBitting*, ma’am. I could work that into your schedule.” -Blake Moran on TV show *Madam Secretary*
- “I tried to *Frankenstein* two smaller pillows together.” -*Apartment Therapy* blog
- “Do you think she’s planning to *Gone Girl* Sandra?” -Cheyene on TV show *Superstore*
- “It’s an old family recipe, *Googled* down from generation to generation.” -Cartoon
- “I *Lexiled* it and found...” -Kevin Baird
- “To help protect your home, *Lysol* that.” -TV commercial (Thanks, Greg!)
- “Musicians *Periscoped* new songs for fans, and journalists *Periscoped* protests.” (macleans.ca)
- “You should never tell a guy that you’ve *Pinterested* your brains out on boards devoted to your fantasy wedding.” -*Self* magazine
- “I wouldn’t shake hands with him unless he *Purels*.” -Laura Diamond on TV show *The Mysteries of Laura* (Thanks, Bonnie!)
- “We need to *Skype* soon.” -B-Bro
- “Stop cleaning. Start *Swiffering*.” -Marketing slogan
- “He once got *Tased* for fun.” -*People* magazine
- “We had to *Uber* here.” -Kevin Ryan on TV show *Castle*
- “Start *Vanguarding* today.” -Vanguard commercial (Thanks, J!)
- “*Windex* kitchen appliances.” -*The Frugal Girl* (blog) chore list



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