

Chapter 2: Writing about Increases and Decreases

Whether you are writing in the field of Mathematics, Economics, Physics, Political Science, Education, or some other area, you undoubtedly use verbs and nouns that express the ways in which things increase and decrease. Writers often need to express increases and decreases when describing conditions, processes, reasons, and results—very common functions in academic writing. In this chapter, you will be introduced to and practice vocabulary and structures to express these types of changes.

2.1 VERBS EXPRESSING INCREASES AND DECREASES

Raising Language Awareness

Exercise 1

The verbs in Table 2.1 express ways in which things can increase or decrease. Put a + in the blank next to all of the verbs in the list whose meanings you are familiar with and that you use in your own writing. Put a ✓ next to those words whose meanings you are familiar with but that you only rarely use. Put a – in the blank next to words you are less familiar with.

Table 2.1: Change-of-State Verbs

___ abate	___ drop (off)	___ peak
___ accelerate	___ dwindle	___ plummet
___ accumulate	___ ease	___ plunge
___ add	___ enlarge	___ proliferate
___ amplify	___ escalate	___ propagate
___ augment	___ exhaust	___ raise
___ boom	___ expand	___ rise
___ build up	___ extend	___ reduce
___ climb	___ fall (off)	___ shoot up
___ compress	___ gain	___ shrink
___ condense	___ grow	___ shrivel
___ contract	___ heighten	___ sink
___ cut	___ inflate	___ skyrocket
___ decelerate	___ intensify	___ slash
___ decline	___ lessen	___ soar
___ deflate	___ lose	___ spike
___ degenerate	___ lower	___ spread
___ deplete	___ maximize	___ swell
___ depreciate	___ minimize	___ subside
___ diminish	___ mount	___ subtract
___ dip	___ multiply	___ surge
___ downsize	___ mushroom	___ tank

Building Your Knowledge

As Table 2.1 shows, many verbs can be used to express increases and decreases—and that list is only a partial one! As you choose the appropriate verb for a context, you may need to consider some of these semantic (meaning) and grammatical features:

1. What kind of increase or decrease do I want to describe?

Consider:

- a number or amount of something

The population has multiplied nearly tenfold.

The school district had to cut courses in many of its programs.

- the ways in which something increases or decreases in physical size

Firefighters fought the blaze, which had expanded to nearly 5 acres.

Radiation treatments successfully shrank the tumor.

- an increase or decrease in importance, value, or overall quality of something

The website's popularity soared after it was redesigned.

SUV vehicles have depreciated faster than was anticipated.

- the degree of intensity in the force or strength of something

Concerns mounted as the hurricane winds grew closer.

The crisis eased when the water level behind the dam was lowered.

- a directional movement: upward or downward (higher or lower)

As soon as the speaker finished, a hand shot up in the audience.

The stock market plunged for a second day, dropping 12 percent.

- an increase or decrease in rate of something faster or slower

Green painted bike lanes have proliferated in Manhattan's streets.

The space shuttle decelerated from 17,000 miles per hour when in orbit to a landing speed of 215 miles an hour.

2. Within each of these categories, how big or small is the increase or decrease? For example, does something get a great deal larger, smaller, higher, or lower?
3. How quickly or slowly does an increase or decrease occur? For example, does something happen rapidly, gradually, or slowly?
4. Which verbs can be used to show how someone or something causes another thing to increase or decrease?
5. Which verbs are used in contexts where what increases or decreases is the subject of the sentence?

The strategies and exercises that follow will help you make appropriate choices among the many options by examining the different meanings and uses of these verbs and the words that can modify them.

Using Verbs to Express Changes in Amount, Size, Quality, and Intensity

A large set of verbs can express increases or decreases regarding changes in the categories of number/amount, size, value or quality, and intensity. See Exercise 2 on page 28.

Decide whether each verb expresses an increase or decrease. Then write it in a box under the correct column in the chart. The first one has been done for you. Two boxes will be empty.

abate	degenerate	gain	mushroom
accumulate	deplete	heighten	proliferate
amplify	depreciate	inflate	propagate
augment	diminish	intensify	reduce
boom	dwindle	lessen	shrink
build (up)	ease	lose	shrivel
compress	enlarge	maximize	spread
condense	escalate	minimize	swell
contract	exhaust	mount	subtract
cut	expand	multiply	subside
deflate	extend		

[illegible]

Using Transitive and Intransitive Verbs Appropriately

An important part of learning the meanings of verbs is knowing which verbs **can** be followed by a direct object (**transitive verbs**), which **cannot** be followed by an object (**intransitive verbs**), and which could be either depending on the context. This is especially true of the verbs expressing increases and decreases. Often for change-of-state verbs, the transitive verb expresses the idea of **making** something larger or smaller in some way, while the intransitive verb expresses the idea of **becoming** larger/smaller (see Table 2.2).

As shown, in many cases an object that is made smaller or larger (*a bag, chances, efforts, concerns*) can often be used as a subject with the same verb to mean “become smaller or larger.” However, this is not true with all verbs and nouns that tend to be used together. For example, we may say that someone *condensed information*, but we would not say *information condensed*. Checking a concordancer to see which forms are used can be very helpful.

Table 2.2: Examples of Change-of-State Verbs

Verb	Common Transitive Meaning	Common Intransitive Meaning
condense	to make smaller in size: <i>I condensed the plastic bag.</i>	to become smaller: <i>The plastic bag condensed.</i>
diminish	to make something less: <i>This may diminish our chances.</i>	to become less: <i>Our chances diminished with each passing day.</i>
intensify	to make stronger: <i>We intensified our efforts.</i>	to become stronger: <i>Our efforts intensified.</i>
multiply	to make larger in number: <i>The huge expenses multiplied their concerns.</i>	to become larger in number: <i>Their concerns multiplied.</i>

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Exercise 3

Keeping in mind that some verbs can be either transitive (verb + direct object) or intransitive (verb – direct object) depending on the context, for each pair of sentences, identify the underlined verbs as transitive (T) or intransitive (I). Write the corresponding letter in the blank provided. If the verb is used transitively, circle the object. The first one has been done for you as an example.

1. T a. Bears are encountering more humans as they expand their range in the Rocky Mountains.
I b. The committee will expand next week to include three more members.
2. a. As the virus spreads, concern extends to other countries not yet affected.
 b. The group extended its concert tour to include five more cities.
3. a. His doctor hopes the radiation will shrink the tumor.
 b. Forecasters predict that the economy will shrink again during the next quarter.
4. a. I believe that my study enlarges the understanding of motivations for this behavior.
 b. When the flower dies, its base enlarges to become a capsule of small black seeds.
5. a. With the deaths of a half million bats from a fungal infection, the insects these animals feed upon may propagate rapidly throughout the eastern states.
 b. The candidate for President declared that her opponent was propagating rumors about her.

One excellent way of building your productive vocabulary is to become more familiar with the object nouns that commonly follow transitive verbs with the meaning of making something larger or smaller.

Exercise 4

Using an online concordancer (e.g., COCA) or a collocations dictionary, find five nouns that can follow each verb as objects. List them next to the verb. If you use a concordancer, check past tense verbs too since they are often more common. If possible, find nouns that are used repeatedly. The first one has been done for you as an example.

Verb	Nouns That Can Follow as Objects
<i>amplify</i>	<i>effects, message, signals, sound, voices</i>
<i>augment</i>	
<i>deplete</i>	
<i>escalate</i>	
<i>lessen</i>	
<i>reduce</i>	

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Some verbs are always or often used intransitively—that is, they describe things that become or grow larger or smaller without mentioning who or what causes the action.

Exercise 5

Using a concordancer or collocations dictionary, find four or five nouns that can occur as subjects for each verb. Keep in mind that you may find more concordancer examples with the past tense of the verbs, such as *subsided*, than when they are in the present tense. The first one has been done for you as an example.

Nouns That Can Precede as Subjects	Verbs
symptoms, worries, violence, turmoil, problems	<i>abate</i>
	<i>condense</i>
	<i>depreciate</i>
	<i>dwindle</i>
	<i>proliferate</i>
	<i>spread</i>
	<i>subside</i>

Exercise 6

Underline the main verb in each sentence. If the sentence correctly uses a transitive verb, write C in the blank provided. If the sentence incorrectly uses an object after an intransitive verb, write I. Rephrase the sentence using the object as the subject of your new sentence. The first one has been done for you as an example.

- I 1. Thousands of newly arrived immigrants boomed the population. The population boomed when thousands of new immigrants arrived.
- ___ 2. He dwindled his job opportunities by dropping out of school.

- ___ 3. Herbs should augment a sound diet and not replace it.

- ___ 4. The opening of the new oil refinery mushroomed the number of jobs.

- ___ 5. Several aspirin and some rest subsided her bad headache.

- ___ 6. Plants growing in shade can build up too much nitrogen. _____

- ___ 7. The economic recession has shriveled individual savings.

- ___ 8. Our company downsized its corporate headquarters last year.

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Exercise 7

Using a dictionary or concordancer, identify which one of the three verbs given for each sentence best collocates with the underlined nouns and other underlined words.

1. After days of intense winds and rain, the storm finally _____.
a. abated b. deflated c. reduced
 2. The counseling staff wants to _____ awareness of depression among college students.
a. accumulate b. inflate c. heighten
 3. As the semester went on, with every B grade on a quiz, Michael's hopes of getting an A in his computer science course _____.
a. contracted b. dwindled c. reduced
 4. I'm sorry to say that it appears we have completely _____ the resources for dealing with this problem.
a. deflated b. exhausted c. lessened
 5. The engineers needed to _____ the sound in the auditorium so that those in the back of the hall could hear.
a. amplify b. enlarge c. multiply
 6. Tensions _____ as the police refused to let the protesters cross the street.
a. extended b. gained c. mounted
 7. The tense situation _____ when one of the protesters fell and was injured.
a. accumulated b. escalated c. expanded
 8. However, tensions in the crowd finally _____ as orders were given by the police chief to let the protesters continue with their march.
a. degenerated b. depleted c. eased
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