# SENTENCE FOCUS GUIDELINES

**Generally Speaking, good writers:**

* **MAKE USE OF CONCRETE SUBJECTS WHENEVER POSSIBLE.**

**Weak:** The reason we need to maintain well-funded public school systems is because present and future generations need them to ensure boundless opportunities.

**Better:** Present and future generations need well-funded public schools to ensure boundless opportunities.

* **MAKE THE DOER OF THE ACTION THE SUBJECT OF THE SENTENCE.**

**Weak:** What the author Alexandra Robbins writes about is how Julie suffers because of the pressure to succeed.

**Better:** The author, Alexandra Robbins, writes about how Julie suffers because of the pressure to succeed

* **AVOID USING "IT" AND "THERE"** AS **SUBJECTS WHENEVER POSSIBLE.**

**Weak:** In some jobs, there are problems with overly aggressive and dictatorial managers who drive away good workers.

**Better:** In some jobs, overly aggressive and dictatorial managers drive away good workers.

* **AVOID PASSIVE VERBS.**

**Weak:** The essay was written by the student.

**Better:** The student wrote the essay.

* **AVOID USING FORMS OF THE VERB "TO BE."**

**Weak:** His need for wild weekends was lost after he turned twenty five. **Better:** He lost his need for wild weekends after he turned twenty five.

**SENTENCE FOCUS, EXERCISE #1:**

**Directions:** Revise the following sentences using this method:

1. Find the word that should be the real subject of the sentence.
2. Right after it, add an active verb (choose a new one if you don’t have one in the sentence already).
3. Then finish the sentence by putting the rest of the information back in, putting these words or phrases as close as possible to the words they describe.

**EXAMPLES:**

1. **Weak:** My reason for missing the appointment was because I couldn't find the doctor's office.

**Better:** I missed the appointment because I couldn't find the doctor's office.

1. **Weak:** There were two actions, which could have been taken by us.

**Better:** We could have taken two actions.

1. The appeal of the advertisement was to children.
2. There is a Brazilian dancer living next door.
3. It was expected of me by my boss that I learn two programming languages.
4. The reason I can’t eat bread is because I am allergic to gluten.
5. His stance in relation to nuclear disarmament is favorable.
6. Her interest in sports was developed at an early age.
7. There have been times when there was no incentive for me to work hard.
8. The result he hoped to achieve was frightening the girls when he waved a skull outside their window.
9. The reason for the confusion of most people with the new regulations is the ambiguous way they were written.
10. Evaluation of research subjects was done by two different teams of highly-trained social psychologists.

**SENTENCE FOCUS EXERCISE #2**

The following sentences are poorly focused, using either weak subjects or verbs, or both. Rewrite these sentences using more concrete subjects and/or more active verbs.

1. It is obvious that there should be more courses in the humanities taken by the average student.
2. In the process of planning his major, the result he hoped to achieve after  
   graduating was getting a good job with a good salary.
3. The reason for the confusion of most people about the new tax-reform proposals is that they are written in legalese, language only lawyers understand.
4. It was when I was waiting in line at the DMV that the realization came to me of  
   how complex dealing with a major bureaucracy is.
5. Her long-winded and unclear sentences have been replaced by succinct, sparkling prose.
6. It is said that absolute power is corrupting.
7. In an ideal society, creating a sense of belonging would be looked upon highly by its citizens.
8. What Tammy Johnson, the author of “Race and Beauty in *America’s Next Top Model,*” is trying to prove is that women, young women especially, can be exploited by the TV executives and unwittingly promote racist and sexist stereotypes.