**Style Continued...**

**1. Expletive Constructions (continued from “Make Subjects Short + *Concrete*”)**

The syntactic pattern for “*It is* true that more government services mean higher taxes” is known as an *expletive* construction. The term *expletive* comes from a Latin word that means “serving to fill out.” The most common examples are *it* and *there*. Consider how the expletives function in the following examples:

* *There* are several prototypes for the artificial heart.
* *It* is obvious that the American West exerted a profound influence on the photography of Ansel Adams.

Compare these sentences with version that eliminate the expletives:

* The artificial heart has several prototypes.
* The American West exerted a profound influence on the photography of Ansel Adams.

As you can see, getting rid of the expletive streamlines the sentence, making the point much more direct and easier to follow. Sometimes, an expletive can be a helpful way to emphasize something (“There are three primary reasons...”). Most of the time, however, getting rid of expletives will make your writing clearer.

**2. Static versus Active Verbs (continued from “Put Key Actions in Verbs, Not Nouns”)**

Verbs energize a sentence. A transitive verb functions as an engine, driving the subject into the predicate, as in the following examples:

* John F. Kennedy effectively *manipulated* his image in the media.
* Thomas Jefferson *embraced* the idea of America as a country of yeoman farmers.

By contrast, *is* and other forms of the verb *to be* (are, was, were) provide an equal sign between the subject and the predicate but otherwise tell us nothing about the relationship between them. Compare the previous two sentences to these two sentences, rewritten using *to be* verbs:

* John F. Kennedy *was* effective at the manipulation of his image in the media.
* Thomas Jefferson’s idea *was* for America to be a country of yeoman farmers.

Rather than making things happen through an active transitive verb, these sentences let everything just hang around in a state of being. In the first version, Kennedy did something – *manipulated* his image – but in the second he just *is* (or *was*), and the energy of the original verb has been siphoned into an abstract noun, manipulation.

Sometimes, you must use a *to be* verb (a definition for example: “Organic gardening is...”). In most cases, eliminated unnecessary use of *to be* verbs will make your prose more vital and direct. The verb you need to substitute for is usually lurking somewhere in the sentence, as in these examples:

* The cost of the book *is* ten dollars.
  + The book *costs* ten dollars.
* The acknowledgement of the fact *is* increasingly widespread that television *is* a replacement for reading in American culture.
  + People increasingly *acknowledge* that television *has replaced* reading in American culture.

**3. Active and Passive Voices: Doing and Being Done To (we’ll never stop talking about passive voice)**

In the *active voice*, the grammatical subject acts; in the *passive voice*, the subject is acted upon. Here are two examples:

* **Active:** Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776.
* **Passive:** *The Wealth of Nations* was written by Adam Smith in 1776.
  + Sometimes, the passive voice hides even when the actor doesn’t appear in the sentence: “*The Wealth of Nations* was written in 1776.”

Passive voice makes your sentence longer. It also makes the sentence more difficult for the reader to follow, since it obscures the *actor* of the sentence (in this case, Adam Smith).

There are reasons to use passive voice; you may want to use passive voice if you want to place emphasis on the object or recipient of the action rather than the actor. Passive voice is standard practice in the sciences for this reason (“Separation of the protein was achieved using an electrophoretic gel.” vs. “The researcher used an electrophoretic gel to separate the protein.”).

For our purposes, the active sentence is almost always better due to clarity and directness. The general rule: you may use passive voice, but you should have a good reason for doing so. In order to convert a sentence to active voice, try to identify the main actor of the sentence (this was done... by who/what?). Then make that actor the *subject* of the sentence.

**4. Write about the Text in the Present Tense**

Many students have a tendency to write about what is happening in the text in either the past tense or the present progressive tense.

* **Past:** Around the end of his journey, Sebald ended up in the psychiatric wing of a hospital in Charlottenstrasse.
* **Present Progressive:** The speaker is directly placing the reader into these situations.

Always talk about what’s happening in the text in the present: “Sebald ends up,” “The speaker directly places.”

\*\*Read through your paper, making the following annotations:

* Underline all uses of “there is/are” and “it is”
* Circle all *to be* verbs (is, are, was, were)

After you have finished locating these verbs,

* Try rewriting any sentences using “There is/are” and “It is” to eliminate the expletive.
* Looking over the sentences that use *to be* verbs, identify which of those sentences are in passive voice.
  + Rewrite the *to be* sentences using more active verbs (when appropriate).
  + Rewrite the sentences using passive voice to active voice (when appropriate).
  + Rewrite sentences in present progressive tense to present tense.