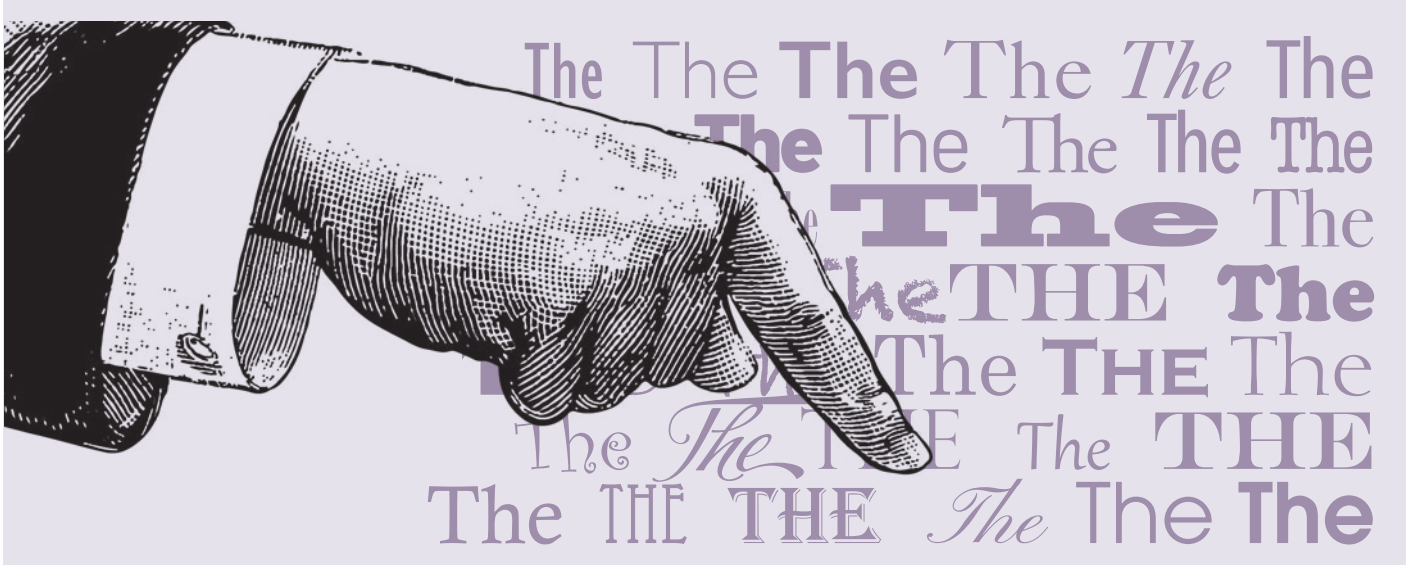# Good Writing Practice

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Syntactic grammar distraction usage or misusage:

Definite article

Introduction

Just like the indefinite article, usage of the definite article *the* is intrinsic to the language. Thus, most English-as-a-first-language authors intuitively collocate *the* with a collocatable noun by "what sounds right". In contrast, English-as-a-second language authors cannot rely on intuition, especially those authors whose first language lacks articles. However, eventual acclimation to English by English-as-a-second language authors results in an increased reliance on intuition. Until then, there are some syntactic situations which function as guidelines for *the* usage or misusage.

Usage guidelines

Inherent uniqueness
Example 1: Widely known noun
  (Material and Methods section)
  Haemoglobin was precipitated.

Revision
  The *haemoglobin was precipitated.*

Notes
Other examples are **the** sun, **the** hypothesis.

Example 2: Pre-mentioned noun
  (Results section: results statement)
  Phagocytosis by dermal fibroblasts was increased.

Revision
  Phagocytosis by **the** *dermal fibroblasts was increased.*

Notes
The revision appeared in the Results section subsequent to mentioning the specific fibroblasts in the Materials and Methods section.

Grammatical uniqueness

Example 3: Subject of a sentence
  (Material and Methods section)
  Protein concentration of the lysate was measured.

Revision
  The *protein concentration of the lysate was measured.*

Notes
Subsequent sentences in the paragraph would be focused on the lysate *protein concentration*.

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Example 4: Proper noun pre-modification
  (Material and Methods section)
  The lysate protein concentration was measured by Bradford assay.

Revision
  The lysate protein concentration was measured by **the** *Bradford assay.*

Notes
The assay is specified by its name, "Bradford".

Example 5: Adjectival pre-modification
  (Material and Methods section)
  The radioactivity was calculated for collagenase-solubilised fraction.

Revision

The radioactivity was calculated for **the** collagenase-solubilised fraction.

Notes

The premodifier *collagenase-solubilised* specifies the noun *fraction*.

Example 6: Adjectival post-modification

(Introduction section: hypothesis)
The zinc-binding ligand may be related to ligand reported to bind calcium.

Revision

The zinc-binding ligand may be related to **the** ligand reported to bind calcium.

Notes

The post-modifier *reported to bind* specifies the noun *ligand*.

Misusage guidelines

Example 1: Redundancy

(Results section: observation)
When the phagocytosis by the dermal fibroblasts was increased by latex bead addition, the intracellular degradation of the recently synthesised collagen increased.

Revision

When phagocytosis by dermal fibroblasts was increased by latex bead addition, intracellular degradation of **the** recently synthesised collagen increased.

Notes

Adding an essential *the*, as justified in the previous examples, has its limitations: redundancy and over-emphasis. Each of the underlined *the*'s in the example is grammatically correct, because the determiner-marked nouns were probably mentioned in previous sections of the journal article. However, they can be deleted, because their cumulative effect is distracting. The decision of which noun to mark with a definite article may depend on emphasis as shown, where the last noun phrase is intended to be the focus of the paragraph.

In the interim, listening to an oral self-expression of a sentence often can test whether *the* before the noun is necessary – the ear (not the eye) is often a better test of direct article necessity, because most people converse much more than they write.

Another test of *the* necessity is one-by-one removal. Beginning at the start of a sentence, test whether reading without the first *the* affects clarity, and then repeat testing the remaining *thes*. By applying this oral testing, a hierarchy of *the* necessity can be developed.

Example 2: Over-emphasis

(Results section: data location)
The comparison of the algorithms is shown in Table 1.

Revision

A comparison of the algorithms is shown in Table 1.

Notes

The connotes that no other means of comparison is possible.

Summary

The indicated guidelines were identified to justify usage and misusage of the determiner *the*. Summary of guidelines for definite article usage and misusage:

Usage	Misusage
Inherent uniqueness	
1. Widely known noun	1. Redundancy
2. Pre-mentioned noun	2. Over-emphasis
Grammatical uniqueness	
3. Sentence subject	
4. Proper noun pre-modification	
5. Adjectival pre-modification	
6. Adjectival post-modification	