

Good Writing Practice

Syntactic number distraction

Redundancy: Unnecessary word repetition

Introduction

The repetition of a word becomes more distracting (i.e., redundant) in proportion to increased number. The word may be considered as individual (e.g., *the's* in a title) or as a constituent of a larger syntactic unit (a phrase or clause).

Experimental sections

Part 1 – Materials and Method section: Method

Example: Redundant “to”

Buccal and lingual full thickness flaps were reflected to gain access to the osteotomy site.

Revision

*Buccal and lingual full thickness flaps were reflected **to access** the osteotomy site.*

Notes

In *to gain access*, *access* is a nominalisation of the verb *to access*, thereby necessitating the usage of the perfunctory verbal *to gain*. In the Revision, the infinitive phrase *to gain access* is denominalised into *to access*, enabling the prepositional phrase *to the osteotomy site* to be syntactically reduced to the noun phrase *osteotomy site*.

Part 2 – Materials and Method section: Materials

Example: redundant “there were”

In group I, there were 17 men and 23 women, whereas in group II there were 19 men and 21 women.

Revision

*The gender distribution was similar between **group I** (17 men, 23 women) and **II** (19 men, 21 women).*

Notes

The constituents of an adverb clause of comparison repeat those in an independent clause. However, in most comparisons, it is possible to place the entities being compared at the end of the sentence with all other information preceding these compared entities – a

transposition that provides thematic focus and end-of-sentence emphasis. In the Revision, the number of men and women is subsumed under group number to show a hierarchy between primary and secondary (e.g., detail) information – such explicit hierarchical levels facilitate comprehension.

Contextual sections

Part 1 – Title of a journal article

Example: redundant “the”

The Molecular Basis of The Marginal Growth Zone in The Developing Liver: The Function of The Notch Pathway

Revision

Molecular Basis of Marginal Growth Zone in Developing Liver: Function of Notch Pathway

Notes

Descriptive titles, which convey the nature of the research rather the message (i.e., the principal results), primarily consist of nouns and prepositional phrases (not verbs or verbals). As result, such noun-rich titles seem to require the usage of articles, definite and indefinite. However, in practice such titles are usually free of definite articles – an article-minimised format considered a telegraphic style.

In the Example, if any of the constituents merit a definite article for emphasis it is *Notch Pathway*, because it is the focus of the research.

In contrast, the addition of a definite article before a less thematic constituent (e.g., *function*) would elicit usage of *the* before *notch pathway* and the other nouns. Thus, the addition of one *the* could have a ‘snow ball’ effect.

Part 2 – Introduction section: Research problem pertinent background

Example: redundant “a”

More than two million hospitalisations and nearly a half a million deaths are attributed to this infection annually.

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Revision 1

*More than two million hospitalisations and nearly **a** half million deaths are attributed to this infection annually.*

Revision 2

*More than two million hospitalisations and nearly half **a** million deaths are attributed to this infection annually.*

Notes

The indefinite article *a* can be redundant. Removal of either of the *a's* results in two revision options. Removal of both *a's* would result in an ungrammatical syntax. Expressions such as *half a million* usually replace *half of a million*, whereby the *a* substitutes for *of a*.

Part 3 – Introduction section: Research problem pertinent background

Example: redundant “to”

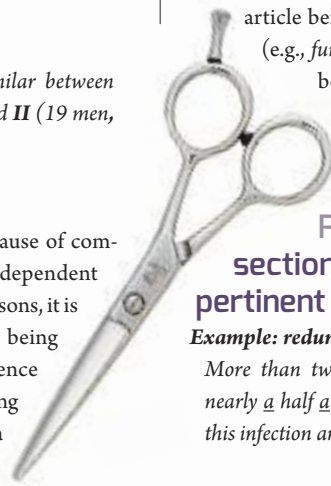
The non-elastic property of woven fabrics is applied to garments to achieve realistic visual effects.

Revision

***To** achieve realistic visual effects, the non-elastic property of woven fabrics is applied to garments.*

Notes

Repetition of *to* occurs when an adverbial *to*-containing prepositional phrase is contiguous to an adverbial infinitive phrase. In the Revision, the adverbial infinitive phrase is transposed to the sentence-start position, thereby distancing the *to's* from each other and minimising the redundant repetition.





Part 4 – Introduction section: Research problem pertinent background

Example: redundant “them”

Mature Mde’s interact with T-cells and activate them.

Revision

*Mature Mde’s interact **with and activate** T-cells.*

Notes

The Example consists of two transitive verbs (*interact with*, *activate*) each with a direct object (the noun *T-cells* and the pronoun *them*). The first verb is phrasal. Because the noun and pronoun are equivalent to *T-cells*, syntactic melding is possible by the coordinated verbs sharing the same direct object *T-cells*.

Part 5 – Introduction section: Research objective

Example: Redundant “and”

We exploited cone cell-specific expression of eGFP to compare the expression of >14,000 genes, consisting of signal transduction, cell cycle, transcription, growth factor, and cell surface proteins and receptors.

Revision

We exploited cone-cell-specific expression of eGFP

*to compare the expression of >14,000 genes, consisting of signal transduction, cell cycle, transcription, growth factor, **and cell surface constituents** (proteins, receptors).*

Notes

In the Revision, subsuming *proteins and receptors* under *cell surface constituents* enables elimination of the second *and*. An objection to subsuming is the usage of the superfluous subsuming word *constituents*. However, subsuming unequivocally denotes that *cell surface* modifies *receptors* as well as *proteins*.

Part 6 – Introduction section: Experimental approach

Example: Redundant object

To determine whether the function of Frizzled-1 is to induce mitosis or maintain it, Frizzled-1 will be characterized by recombination experiments on skin explant cultures.

Revision

*To determine whether the function of Frizzled-1 is **to induce** or maintain **mitosis**, Frizzled-1 will be characterized by recombination experiments on skin explant cultures.*

Notes

A progressive syntactic reduction of the co-

ordinated pairs provides insight that the coordinated pairs are infinitive phrases.

to induce mitosis or to maintain mitosis
to induce mitosis or to maintain it
to induce mitosis or maintain it
to induce or maintain mitosis

Summary

The rhetorical severity of repetition is a dissonance distraction. It is interesting that of the eight examples, six are distributed in the contextual sections; all of the examples of redundancy occur intra-sentence.

Several syntactic techniques are involved in eliminating redundant words, ranging from deletion of articles in a title to end-of-sentence comparison transformation in a complex sentence consisting of an independent and adverb clause. Perhaps the most interesting is the melding of contiguous infinitive phrases (or an infinitive and preposition phrase) to avoid the monotony of the infinitive marker *to* and the preposition *to*.

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