

Good Writing Practice

Syntactic inter-sentence distraction

Omission: Continuity markers

Introduction

Paragraph lengthiness and complexity cause a continuity inexplicity (discontinuity), which can be lessened by using forecasting and backcasting markers of the information pattern. Thus, omission of such continuity markers (e.g., a subheading) impedes immediate comprehension. In this article, examples of continuity marker omission are analysed according to the section of a journal article (experimental, contextual), the conceptual component therein, and the type of omitted marker.

Experimental section

Part 1 – Materials and methods section: method

Example: omitted subheading

At the Chilao study site (San Gabriel Mountains, California), after soil temperature measurement (LaMotte Chemical dial thermometer), small samples of soil (2 m intervals) were collected (trowel), placed into a bag, dried, and mixed. A few table spoons of soil were dried (to the nearest ounce), heated (4 h, 550°C), reweighed (25°C), and the amount expressed as a percentage of total weight.

A LaMotte Deluxe Turf Lab Soil Kit (Model TL-2) was used to determine the following: nitrate nitrogen (mixed acid reagent and nitrate reducing reagent); phosphorus (NF extracting solution and charcoal suspension); potassium (K solution); iron (iron reagent #1 and #2); calcium and magnesium (Schwarzenback EDTA titration method). Nitrate, phosphorus, and iron were measured colorimetrically.

Revision

Collection and processing – At the Chilao study site (San Gabriel Mountains, California), ...

Chemical analyses – A LaMotte Deluxe Turf Lab Soil Kit (Model TL-2) ...

Notes

In the Example, the omission of in-text subheadings results in an inexplicit shift from one research activity (collection and processing) to another (chemical analyses). Inclusion of the subheadings facilitates continuity between dense paragraphs of different types of information.

Part 2 – Materials and methods section: method

Example: omitted determiner

Three hepatoma cell lines were used in this experiment.

Revision

The three hepatoma cell lines were used in this experiment.

Notes

Without *the*, it would seem that the noun phrase three hepatoma cell lines (probably mentioned in the Introduction section) is mentioned for the first time, avoiding not only its prior mention but its importance in context. The definite article, a marker of uniqueness (e.g., the sun), also denotes that a noun was previously mentioned and, thus, known to the reader and the author. The definite article thus functions as a marker of continuity, intra- and especially inter-sentence. Therefore, a continuity gap can occur if the definite article or a stronger type of determiner is missing.

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In addition to articles, pronouns (indefinite, demonstrative) and numbers can function as determiners.

Part 3 – Materials and methods section: method

Example: omitted determiner

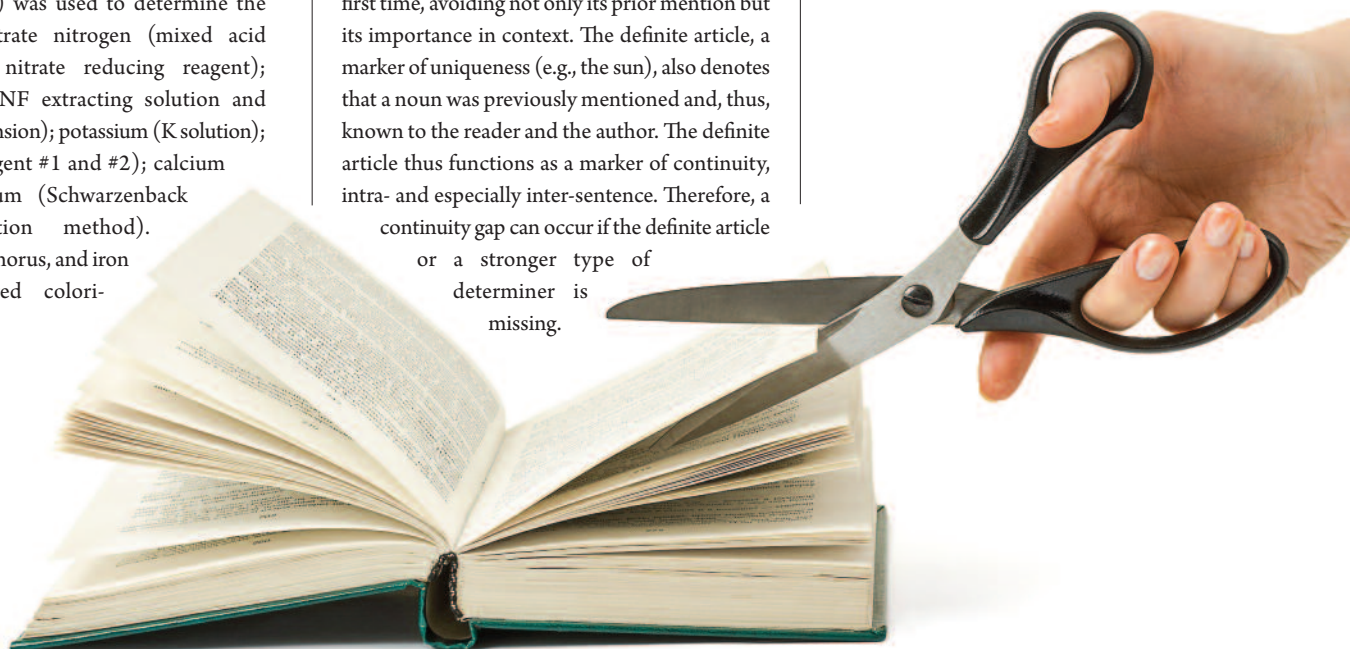
Many studies were performed in vitro.

Revision

Many **of the** studies were performed in vitro.

Notes

Without *of the*, there is no denotation that the studies were previously mentioned. The usage of *the* alone as in *many the* is unconventional. Other indefinite pronoun determiners that require *of* are *none* and *some*. In contrast, *all the* sounds conventional, but *all of the* would be consistent with usage of the others.



Contextual sections

Part 1 – Introduction section: research problem pertinent background

Example: omitted end-of-sentence appositives

To obtain the best performance from processors, two essential assistants can be considered. The compilers maximise the parallelisation and balance workloads. The interconnects among clusters improve the processor performance by overcoming the partitioning overhead as inter-cluster communications.

Revision

To obtain the best performance from processors, two essential assistants can be considered: **compilers and interconnects among clusters**. The compilers maximise the parallelisation and balance workloads. The interconnects among clusters improve the processor performance by overcoming the partitioning overhead as inter-cluster communications.

Notes

Forecasting the assistants (*compilers and interconnects among clusters*) as appositives at the end of the first sentence provides explicit continuity to the second and third sentences. This forecasting improves inter-sentence continuity.

Part 2 – Introduction section: research problem pertinent background

Example: omitted determiner

Bacteria can spread quickly from cavities to apical through straight root canals of baby teeth, resulting in infected bone and periodontal tissue. Infection will impair craniofacial development.

Revision 1

Bacteria can spread quickly from cavities to apical through straight root canals of baby teeth, resulting in infected bone and periodontal tissue. **The** infection will impair craniofacial development.

Revision 2

Bacteria can spread quickly from cavities to apical through straight root canals of baby teeth, resulting in infected bone and periodontal tissue. **Such** infection will impair craniofacial development.

Notes

Inclusion of a determiner fills the continuity gap between the first and second sentence. Some continuity is provided by echo of the word *infected* as *infection*. In Revision 1, further continuity is provided by *the*. In Revision 2, the indefinite pronoun determiner *such* renders the continuity explicit. Usage of the determiner *this* (or *that*)

would be a little less emphatic. Thus, there seems to be a hierarchy of determiner-elicited continuity marking: *such* > *this/that* > *the*.

Summary

Forecasting markers (subheadings; end-of-sentence appositives) facilitate comprehension in paragraphs common to a Materials and Methods section. However, backcasting markers (determiners *the, such*; indefinite pronouns *many of the*) cohere text in all sections of a journal article.

Omission of forecasting or backcasting markers diminishes paragraph continuity, resulting in impeded immediate comprehension.

The taxonomic nomenclature of omission indicates the revision option: addition of the omitted forecasting marker (subheading, end-of-sentence appositives) or backcasting marker (determiner) if they indeed minimise impeded immediate comprehension. Furthermore, there is a sub-option for the usage of determiners: the hierarchy of emphasis among the indefinite backcasting determiners *such* > *this/that* > *the*.

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