**Grammar: In-Class Activities**

In these in-class activities you will gain more practice applying some of the most important grammar-based concepts to improve pieces of writing, before turning your attention to an important new concept: the correct use of the definite and indefinite articles. To conclude the activities you will look at an old piece of your own work with the aim of improving it by using the grammatical rules you have been learning.

**Activity 1: Consistency in Verb Tenses, Subject/Verb Agreement and Parallel Structure (10 minutes, work together)**

In the pre-class activities you read about the importance of maintaining the same tense in your writing to avoid confusing your readers. You also considered why it is important to make sure the subject and main verb of each sentence agree, and then learned about the need to write in parallel structure.

This first activity should act as a recap. Try to find as many grammar-based errors in the paragraph of writing below and then come up with correct/suitable alternatives.

*Scientists in the US believe they have found only the third example of a cancer spread by cell-cell contact. They found that clams suffer from a type of leukaemia, which will generally kill infected individuals after a certain time. The research group initially predicted that the cancer was being spread virally, but genetic fingerprinting techniques instead point firmly at a cell-cell mode of action. The group believe that infected cells are transferred if clams will come into contact with one another, or when they are transported by chance by ocean currents. A strong current, with its many intricacies, are able to transport cells thousands of kilometres up the eastern seaboard. The scientists said that the hypotheses they are working on open up a whole host of new questions about how diseases may be spread across vast distances in the ocean, and the answers to these questions undoubtedly have implications for human health. Neither these scientists nor health professionals believes that the cancerous clams are a risk to humans, though. The affected species are often used in dishes popular with fans of seafood, Cajun cuisine, and in French restaurants. Before the scientific community accept the news that a third species of animal can catch cancer via cell-cell contact, a controlled lab-based experiment will need to show the disease transfer in such a way. Everybody in the team want to pursue such experiments as quickly as possible. The other two known examples of cell-cell cancer transmission occurs in Tasmanian devils and some species of dog. Tasmanian devils are wide-ranging, elusive and are icons in their native Australia.*

***Note that your instructor will spend a few minutes going over the solutions to this activity before you move on to the next activity.***

**Using the Definite and Indefinite Articles – *The* and *A/An***

You should use the definite article ***the*** to refer to something when you are referring to something specific (or *definite*). In contrast, you should use the indefinite articles ***a*** or ***an*** to refer to something non-specific (or *indefinite*).

The important thing to bear in mind is that a word on its own cannot be categorized as requiring the definite or indefinite article; instead, it is the way that you refer to that word that determines which article you should use.

One quick tip to see whether you require an article in your writing at all is to read the sentence without it and see if it means the same thing; if it does, then you can safely remove the article. For example: “Anteaters like ***the*** sunshine,” means the same thing when written as: “Anteaters like sunshine,” so you need not use the definite article in this case.

**The Definite Article – *The***

Remember that you should use ***the*** when referring to something specific. For example, you can write: “I saw ***the solution*** in the lab,” if you are referring to a specific solution (perhaps there is only one in there, or you have just been talking about a specific solution). However, if you saw one of many that were in the lab, you should write: “I saw ***a solution*** in the lab.”

**The Indefinite Articles - ‘A’ and ‘An’**

Recall that you should use the indefinite articles, ***a*** or ***an***, to refer to something non-specific. You should speak a word rather than read it to help you decide whether to use ***a*** or ***an***: although there are some exceptions, you should generally use ***a*** when referring to a word that makes a consonant sound, and use ***an*** when referring to a word that makes a vowel sound.

For example, you should write: “***A Bunsen burner…”*** or: “***A thermometer…”*** because these words begin with consonants (and make consonant sounds when spoken). However, you should write: “***An oscillator…”***or: “***An amp-meter…”*** because these words begin with vowels and make vowel sounds when spoken).

The reason that it is helpful to speak words aloud when deciding whether to use ***a*** or ***an*** is because silent letters could otherwise confuse you when simply seeing them written.

For example, you should write: “Professor Hamilton scored ***a hat-trick,”*** (because the ***h*** in this word makes a consonant sound), but you should write: “The same player acted in ***an honourable*** way when passing up another goal due to an opposition player being injured,” (because the ***h*** in this word is silent, which means the ***o*** is the first letter you hear, and this ***o*** makes a vowel sound).

This same general rule applies when using acronyms in your writing, which is why you should write: “***A NASA*** spacecraft is currently taking pictures of Mars,” but: ***“An EPA*** directive ensures that businesses attempt to reduce their carbon emissions.”

**Activity 2 (10 minutes, work together)**

First, work together to decide whether the definite or indefinite articles – or neither – should be used to fill in the blanks below:

*\_\_\_ peck-the-bug computer game designed for birds has helped to suggest why bugs may have evolved \_\_\_\_\_ amazing, colourful iridescence. \_\_\_\_ game, called DOTPECK, required \_\_\_\_ birds to track the movement of \_\_\_\_ bugs across a computer screen and peck at them in the belief that they were real items of prey. Each bird spent a quarter of \_\_\_\_ hour at the game, and performed significantly better when pecking at dull, non-shimmering bugs, as opposed to \_\_\_\_ iridescent, shimmering ones. The research was led by \_\_\_\_ UL-funded team in England, which is now keen to see whether birds perform similarly with live prey. The team acknowledged \_\_\_\_ heuristic quality of \_\_\_\_ DOTPECK game. Despite this, \_\_\_\_ exciting element of many to emerge from the results is that \_\_\_\_ bugs might have evolved iridescence because it helps them avoid predation.*

Now spend some time correcting the errors in the following sentences. *Note that there may be more than one error in each sentence.*

1) Please could you pass me a lab manual that is in my bag?

2) I was reading it last night, before I heard a ominous sound in the hallway.

3) I have a horrible feeling my apartment is haunted by the ghost from a previous age.

4) I know that sounds crazy but I’m a honest believer in the supernatural.

5) Never mind, let’s get on with a quiz we have to complete before the class ends.

6) At least red lipstick on my mirror doesn’t spell out ‘RedRum’, but ‘Remember, Chemistry 201 Exam, May 20!’

***Note that your instructor will spend a few minutes going over the solutions to this activity before you move on to the final activity.***

**Activity 3 (20 minutes, work alone and then together)**

You should take out the old essay or piece of writing that you were asked to bring to class (this was mentioned in the pre-class activities).

Read over this piece of work and look for any of the four main grammar-based errors that are particularly common, and which you have learned about so far (inconsistent and confusing shifts in verb tense, subject/verb non-agreement, non-parallel form of elements in sentences, and unsuitable use or non-use of the definite and indefinite articles).

Try to make edits to your work to improve it. If you finish early, work with a partner to look over each other’s work and see whether you can spot any errors they may have missed. This will give you practice of the peer review process as well as applying grammar-based rules to improve your own work.