

Grammar & Mechanics – Lesson 6

USING "THE" - THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

1. Objectives

This unit addresses a mistake that some proficient speakers of English make: omitting **the** when it is needed in sentences. The unit describes this error and provides practice with correcting the deliberate omission of *the*.



Caution: This unit does not explain all the rules for using articles in English (*a, an, the*). The appropriate use of **the** can be very difficult if you grew up speaking a language with a different article system. Consult a resource for ESL writers, and ask others for help proof reading for *a* and *the*.

2. "The" in notes vs. complete sentences

The use of **the** can be different in **notes** vs. **complete sentences**. When you write notes (or text messages), it is appropriate to omit **the** as long as the meaning is clear. Notes do not have to be grammatically complete sentences.

However, when you are writing complete sentences, it is important to include **the** whenever it is required. Clients and experienced engineers expect to see full sentences in memos, reports, proposals, cover letters—and even in most emails.

Notes form (<i>the</i> omitted)	Complete sentence form (<i>the</i> included)
<u>Client comment on a report and engineer's response</u> Comment: Show barscale. Resolution: Scale is noted on bottom right hand corner of sheets.	Show the barscale. The scale is noted on the bottom right hand corner of the sheets.

Some proficient speakers of English lower the effectiveness of their writing for professors or clients because they omit **the**.

Student field observation memo: Incorrect switching between accurate use of *the* and ungrammatical omission of *the*

On Wednesday October 3, 2015, Team Z from the Introduction to Civil Engineering course visited **the** City of Springfield building, located at 1234 SW 1st Ave. **Visit** lasted approximately one hour. **Purpose** of **the** visit was to listen to three professional engineers discuss their work for **the** city and their respective bureaus. **Discussion** held during **visit** is summarized below.

Effective professional writing does not omit *the* in complete sentences.

Practitioner geotechnical report for new highway signs: Appropriate use of *the*

... **The purpose** of **the investigation** was to develop recommendations for **the design and construction** of sign support foundations. Our scope of work was outlined in a statement of work submitted by ABC Engineering dated March 30, 2015. **The scope** of **the geotechnical work** included exploratory drilling, engineering analysis and preparation of this report.

Your writing should reflect your accuracy and precision as an engineer. Even if you think the idea is clear without *the*, do not omit it when you write complete sentences.

3. "The" makes connections clear.

The is also important because it makes connections between your ideas explicit for readers.

Example from a practitioner report	Explanation
The US 36 / I-605 interchange currently experiences significant congestion throughout the peak periods of the day. To alleviate the congestion , the existing ramp, I-605 southbound to US 36 westbound, will be widened from 1-2 lanes to 2 continuous lanes.	Sentence 1 introduces "significant congestion." Using " the congestion" in sentence 2 makes it clear that the writer is referring to the same congestion as in sentence 1. Here omitting <i>the</i> would be grammatical but not as clear.

4. Practice

These sentences are from civil engineering student papers. Add *the* where it is needed for complete sentences. You will recognize the first one from the example in Section 2.

1. On Wednesday October 3, 2015, Team Z from the Introduction to Civil Engineering course visited the City of Springfield building, located at 1234 SW 1th Ave. Visit lasted approximately one hour. Purpose of the visit was to listen to three professional engineers discuss their work for the city and their respective bureaus. Discussion held during visit is summarized below.
2. The site gradually slopes from the higher south end to the north. Perimeter of the grounds on the west, south, and east ends are lined with vegetation (Figure 3). Configuration of site allows numerous alternatives for parking and site access orientation.

3. A sample was taken from site and dried. Using a mortar and pestle, sample was broken down into silty lumps.
4. The information at hand suggests contractor failed to inform engineer and Flatland County in writing that the work was substantially complete.
5. The subsurface conditions were obtained through our borings. See Appendix A for boring logs.
Sample collected underwent laboratory testing to determine type of soil.

If you discover that you got many answers wrong or if you found this exercise confusing, look up more information about the use of English articles (*a*, *an* and *the*). See the resources at www.cewriting.org/references/

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