Teaching Determiners in a Writing Unit

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Introduction

This paper first provides a concise overview of the English determiner system. It then proposes that students can best learn to use determiners accurately through explicit instruction. The paper concludes with an application of this idea in a four-lesson writing unit plan that encourages students to discover accurate determiner use in authentic English texts, in all of their complexity. Through discovery, reflection, collaborative rule building, and production, students increase their understanding and confidence using the determiner system in English. They will do these learning activities as part of their project work to develop an original English business letter. Through writing multiple drafts and gaining peer and expert feedback, they will not only improve the accuracy of their determiner use but also increase their ability to participate in business English discourses and actualize their personal and professional goals.

The English Determiner System

The Grammar Book (1999) defines determiners as "that special class of words that limit the nouns that follow them" (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, p. 19). Determiners are distinct from adjectives because they are a relatively fixed category of words that are always followed by a noun,

as opposed to adjectives, which are frequently coined or invented and need not precede a noun (Capital Community College, 2004). Hockey and Mateyak (1998) add that,

> as an informal semantic description, determiners contribute something quantitative or identificational to the NP interpretation (e.g. many dogs, few dogs, this dog) which is quite different from adjectives which contribute qualitative information to the interpretation of NPs in which they appear (e.g. big dogs, red dogs, fast dogs, hungry dogs). (p. 3)

Because determiners connote meaning about the nouns they limit, certain determiners only mark certain kinds of nouns. For example, *a* is always followed by a singular noun, and *many* only occurs with plural nouns. A few determiners only work with noncount nouns, such as *much* and *a little*. Others, like *the* and *my* may occur with any common noun. Learners of English must have a strong sense of singular versus plural and count versus noncount nouns in order to use determiners effectively. For this reason, teaching of determiners begins with a review of count and noncount nouns. It is helpful to break determiners into three groups in order better to understand their use: 1) core determiners 2) pre-determiners, and 3) post-determiners. All three kinds mark *years* in the following example: ***Once every ten*** *years I go on another honeymoon with my wife.* (Note: see Hockey and Mateyak (1998) for a more comprehensive analysis than the *pre-*, *core*, and *post-* description of ordering determiners.)

Core Determiners

Core determiners include possessives, demonstratives, and articles, such as in ***My*** *boy*, ***This*** *boy*, and ***The*** *boy.* Like all determiners, they always precede the noun they modify unless there is an adjective in front of the

noun, in which case they precede the adjective (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 19). For example, **The tall boy** *jumped in the water first.* Phrasal quantifiers are also core determiners. An example of a phrasal quantifier is *They splashed **a lot of** water around.* Phrasal quantifiers are to be distinguished from partitives, such as **a gallon of** *water* because they express non-specific/exact quantities and can precede partitives. Notice the difference between: 1) *A lot of butter **is** called for by the recipe.* and 2) *Two pounds of butter **are** required by the recipe.* Phrasal quantifiers are determiners that limit the nouns that follow them, and they do not act as a noun the way a partitive does, e.g. *Two pounds are required.* (pp. 332–333).

The demonstrative determiners are perhaps the easiest to learn and use. They distinguish definite nouns by "proximity and number" (p. 300).

	Singular	*Plural*
Near	This	These
Far	That	Those

The singular demonstratives mark noncount nouns. Biber, et al. point out that while demonstratives resemble the definite article *the,* "the demonstrative determiners are stressed, whereas the definite article is almost always unstressed" (1999, p. 272). Students need to be aware that demonstratives can function as pronouns, in which case they can operate like any other pronoun and occupy a noun phrase position in a sentence. For example: *Are **those** the boys you were telling me about?*

Other core determiners that students will likely have mastered at an early stage in their learning are possessives, including *my, our, your, his, her, its, their, Mary's,* etc. Possessives define noun phrases and can mark not only count and noncount NPs but also proper nouns, as in *Your Stacy*

keeps leaving her toys in our yard. (Biber, et al., 1999, p. 271). Core determiners also include interrogatives (**What** *time is it?*), relatives (*Use* **whichever** *one you want.*), and indefinites (**Some** *laptops perform better than others.*). The most common core determiners are articles (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990, p. 73).

Articles are not only the most common, but also the most complex determiners. Articles limit nouns in the following combinations:

	Singular Count	Plural Count	Noncount
Definite	*the boy*	*the boys*	*the money*
Indefinite	*a boy*	*boys* (ø article)	*money* (ø article)

Accurate use of the indefinite articles *a/an* and *ø* and the definite article *the* requires learners to have an explicit or implicit understanding of new versus given, generic versus specific, and definite versus indefinite information in a noun phrase. Looking at the chart above, we see how definiteness is most important in distinguishing which article to use, and Master (1990) suggests that we might eliminate newness and specificity and bring them together with a modified concept of definiteness to say an article simply *classifies* or *defines* a noun phrase (p. 466). With this method, the grammar is simplified for students, and they need only determine whether a common noun is "classified" or "defined," whether it is count or mass, and in the case of count nouns, whether it is singular or plural (p. 470).

As we will see in a description of newness, specificity, and definiteness, it is potentially confusing to try to fuse these concepts, and rather than present the grammar as simpler than it is, students should encounter the complexity of the grammar. By providing structured assistance and allowing collaboration, each student can make the progress he or she is ready to make. Furthermore, as time passes, each student has the foundation

to continue to make progress with even the most complicated aspects of article use. A further description of the concepts in question will clarify this pedagogical approach.

Learners will implicitly be familiar with the first of the three concepts, **new** versus **given** information. When introduced with an article, a new noun phrase *usually* receives an indefinite article in English. Once a noun phrase is given, following instances are *usually* preceded with a definite article. Learners need to be aware of exceptions, however, such as in the case of, *When you arrive, you will find the key to the house hidden in the stone turtle in the garden.* Here the nouns *key, house*, *turtle*, and *garden* could all be mentioned for the first time, but they are also definite in the sense that the listener, even if he or she has never been to *the house*, is supposed to understand the context of the visit, that there is a door with a key and so on. The "situational reference" is "in the minds of the speaker and listener," (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990, p. 78). This brings us to the idea of definiteness.

Finegan (1999) explains, "Speakers mark a noun phrase as **definite** when they assume that the listener can identify its referent; otherwise, the noun phrase is marked as **indefinite**" (p. 268). An interlocutor may have knowledge of a referent noun when the noun is

- unique because of general knowledge, as in   ***The moon** is full tonight.*
- unique in the particular situation, as in   ***The car** is out front.*
- given information (anaphoric), as in   *I bought a book, but **the book** was useless.*
- identified in the phrase (cataphoric), as in   *I bought **the book** my professor suggested.*

(Greenbaum, 1991, p.95). A noun may also be unique because it is super-

lative, ordinal, or "logically unique" (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990, p. 79). These cases include noun phrases with post-determiners such as: ***the best reason, the first*** *reason,* and ***the sole*** *reason*. English discourse also displays the definite article in reference to "common experience" that has become "institutional" and in reference to "parts of the body" and "medical" terms, e.g. *the head, the arms, the lungs, etc* (p. 79).

The indefinite articles *a/an* and *ø* usually mark nouns as new, generic, general, or otherwise not referring to shared information with an interlocutor. The word *one* in place of *a/an* slightly emphasizes the singularity of a noun, and the words *some* or *any* can often be used or omitted in conjunction with *ø* with no change in meaning, e.g. *Do you have* (*any*) *tea?* (see Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990, pp. 80 – 81 for exceptions). The zero article may pose a special challenge to learners because it does indicate definiteness in some cases: 1) *Juana was selected to be* (*the*) *master of ceremonies.*

A sense of definiteness is the most important concept for learners to understand if they are to use articles effectively. In order to raise learner awareness, it will be helpful to contrast the way English and the learners' L1 mark definiteness. For example, Finegan (1999) writes:

> Mandarin languages do not have articles and must rely on other means to mark definiteness, if they mark it at all. In Mandarin Chinese, word order is used to mark definiteness. When the subject comes before the verb, … it must be interpreted as definite; if it follows the verb, … it is indefinite. (p. 269)

Contrasting the way English and a learner's L1 mark definite information will help learners to get a feel for the concept of definiteness. Students will need more than "a feel" for definiteness, however, and exposure to, hypothesizing about, and practicing with the use of indefinite and definite determiners will help students improve their accuracy.

In addition to newness and definiteness, English speakers also use articles to mark whether a noun phrase is **generic**, referring to a class of nouns, or **specific**, referring to a particular noun. For example, *A pen may be used to write your name.* versus *Use **the** pen on the table to write your name.* Although this may seem like a basic distinction, consider the following generic sentences:

[1] *A lion* is a great cat from the plains of Africa.

[2] *The lion* is a great cat from the plains of Africa.

[3] *Lions* are great cats from the plains of Africa.

[4] **The lions* are great cats from the plains of Africa. *(* unacceptable)*

At least the definite article may not be used with *lions* to refer to the generic class of lions. But consider the following example from Greenbaum (1991, p. 94):

[1] *An American* works hard.

[2] *The American* works hard.

[3] *Americans* work hard.

[4] *The Americans* work hard. *(acceptable!)*

The same duality applies for specific nouns, which are usually marked by *the*, but may be marked by *a* as in *Peter has a girlfriend.* Here *a girlfriend* is certainly a particular person as opposed to a kind of person. So to use articles learners may not simply memorize rules such as: Use an indefinite article before a noun the first time it is used in a paragraph. They must understand the meaning of new versus given, definite versus indefinite, and generic versus specific.

Predeterminers and Postdeterminers

Greenbaum (1991) advises that core determiners may not be used together to limit a noun. Core determiners, however, may be surrounded by

a pre-determiner and/or a post-determiner. For example: *All the **other** boys jumped in too.* The predeterminers also mark nouns and can be divided into those that always precede a core determiner and those that can stand alone. The first group includes multipliers and fractions and creates noun phrases like *twice the time* and *one-fifth the cost.* The second group includes *all, both, half, what,* and *such* and creates noun phrases such as *all the time* and *what a shame.* Greenbaum (1991) illustrates that *such* is a special pre-determiner because "it can combine with other pre-determiners (*all such jokes*) and can come after a central determiner (*no such jokes*) and even a post-determiner (*many such jokes*)" (p. 96).

Postdeterminers function much like predeterminers except they follow core determiners. The postdeterminer *own* may be added to a sentence for emphasis, such as in *I want you to start taking care of your **own** business and stop worrying about what other people are doing!* (Biber, et al., 1999, p. 271). The postdeterminer *same* expresses "referential identity" (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 300). For example: *There is a black limousine out front. The **same** limousine that was out front yesterday.* Ordinal and cardinal numbers are all postdeterminers and they "can co-occur," (Greenbaum, 1991, p. 96). For example: *The **first four** contestants will advance to the next round.* Other ordinals such as *last* and *other* and other quantifiers (besides numbers) such as *many* and *few* may be used in the same way. For example: *The **last few** survivors were saved yesterday.*

All postdeterminers, as opposed to just some predeterminers, may stand alone to mark nouns. For example, ***Second** prize goes to the gentleman from Nebraska.* Learners need to be careful to note the difference between *John studied **little**.* and *John studied **a little**.* The first case indicates he hardly studied at all and the second indicates he did do some work. A similar distinction lies between the quantifiers *few* and *a few*. As a final note on

quantifiers, learners need to be aware that questions and negative answers take certain "non-assertive" quantifiers such as *any, many, much* and that positive answers use certain "assertive" quantifiers like *some, a lot of, a little,* and *a few* (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990, p. 77). For example, *Do you have much money?* may not be answered with **Yes, I have much money.*

Teaching Determiners

> I know that it is <u>personal reason</u> for not going to classes. Today, I have many things to do, such as <u>GKE, voca quiz, and presentation</u>… I do not ant to be <u>risk</u> to my teammates, Zhang and Ioana. Please tell me about <u>make up situation</u> for today. Anyway, I hope to see you on tomorrow.

A student wrote the above passage in an email in 2004. At the end of the term, this student, along with others, indicated that articles are one of the most difficult parts of English grammar. The underlined noun phrases above reveal a student who is struggling to use articles accurately. Many students of English as a foreign language struggle to use English articles and other determiners accurately because of differences between English article use and article use in their first languages, if their first languages even possess articles. Izzo (1999) reports that a survey of 34 professors in 20 Japanese Universities found English articles to be a frequently reported grammar problem in comparison with other common errors (p. 5).

Student ability to use articles and other determiners correctly will significantly affect their English language proficiency, because although English can be understood without determiners, inaccurate use of determiners marks a speaker as a non-expert. Consider, for example, *I am writing letter in response to 40-minute call with AT&T representative regarding error on AT&T long distance bill.* versus *I am writing this letter in response to a*

40-minute call with an AT&T representative regarding an error on my AT&T long distance bill. There is an inherent difficulty in teaching the use of determiners, because nouns take different determiners in different phrases with similar meanings, such as: *I struck him with **anger**! I struck him with **an anger** I had never known before. I struck him with **all of this anger** I did not recognize.* If students can understand how particular determiners mark nouns and practice using them, however, they can come to use them with greater accuracy and confidence. More than one colleague has argued that it is useless to teach articles explicitly to students, that learners must acquire article use implicitly; however, students have requested explicit instruction and have actively engaged in it.

The explicit approach to teaching English determiners advocated in the writing unit below follows from Ellis' (2002) four beliefs regarding grammar learning:

1. …the constraints that govern the teaching of implicit knowledge do not apply to the teaching of explicit knowledge…
2. …L2 learners (at least adolescent and adult learners) are capable of mastering quite sophisticated explicit knowledge…
3. …explicit knowledge assists the processes involved in the use and acquisition of implicit knowledge…
4. …grammar teaching, directed at explicit knowledge, should not seek to have an immediate effect on learners' ability to use a grammatical structure accurately in communication. (pp.163–164)

Indeed, the tasks within the unit plant seeds in the learners' minds. Learners will raise their awareness of determiner use and struggle with explicitly understanding the grammar point. Undoubtedly, they will already possess implicit knowledge of determiner use. Asking them to articulate what they know and co-construct knowledge with their classmates will pique student

interest, awareness, and autonomy with regard to their English determiner use. Primed by this activity, the students then access expert sources of knowledge in the form of the instructor and the written resources they have gathered. Students with a greater mastery can share their written resources and strategies for using determiners correctly, and students with a lesser degree of mastery can reexamine their strategies and increase their resources for accurate usage. Ellis (2002) makes three excellent points with regard to this kind of discovery-based learning. First, students may be more motivated when they are encouraged to explore L2 grammar. Second, students may "form and test hypotheses" about L2 grammar. Finally, students may discover understandings of L2 grammar that a text may never have supplied or might never supply (pp. 164–165).

In this discovery-based writing unit, students become more competent with English determiners as they collaborate in teams, test hypotheses, gather resources, and practice reading, writing, speaking and listening to determiner use in context. One task involves investigating authentic data and hypothesizing rule formation in groups. Groups encounter determiners and begin to search for patterns and rules governing their use. Once they have discussed their hypotheses, they share their guidelines for use with the class. The class can then engage in a wider discussion of their explicit knowledge of determiner use. Finally, students will receive assistance from the instructor and will turn to expert resources, which they will have researched. Student generated examples and authentic business letter discourse are certain to raise other grammar questions, and this creates focus on form opportunities for teaching, both by "reacting" to grammar questions with impromptu micro lessons and by preparing "pre-emptive" micro lessons for future classes (Ellis, 2001, pp. 22–23).

Master's 1994 research indicates it is appropriate to use a planned focus

on form approach to teach the English article system. Master's *The effect of systematic instruction on learning the English article system* provides a theoretical basis for this unit's approach. Master suggests that providing comprehensible input is not sufficient for EFL acquisition of the English article system and that learners of English will benefit from explicit, focus on form instruction (Ellis, 2001). Master writes that an emphasis on comprehensible input and communicative competence fails to yield acquisition with, "… aspects of syntax that contribute little to communicative effectiveness" (p. 229). Input-based, communicative, and focus on forms approaches, while valuable, fail to provide learners with the instruction they need to use English articles. In his 1994 study, learners who received specific article instruction benefited over those who did not. Master ends his study with this statement:

> The present study suggests that language instruction is beneficial if that instruction is based on a systematic presentation of the material, that is, when the material is presented in a hierarchy of manageable segments with continuous building on what has been taught before. (p. 24)

The following writing unit provides students with an opportunity to discover for themselves what the next manageable segments of explicit information are in the hierarchy of guidelines for using English determiners. Furthermore, it allows each student to build confidence to move towards learning the next manageable segment as he or she constructs an English business letter.

Unit Plan

Unit:	The English Business Letter – 4 class meetings
Dates:	4/25/2005 – 5/23/2005
Time:	9:00 – 10:30, 10:40 – 12:20

Level:	High Intermediate – EFL University
Background:	Japanese College Students
Unit Objectives:	Students will be able to write an authentic and effective business letter in English. Ss will understand how to use a business letter as a tool in their real lives. Ss will be able to improve their writing using a multi-draft peer-review process. Ss will practice providing thoughtful feedback to peer writing. Ss will feel more confident about writing formal English documents. Ss will be able to understand the defining features of a business letter, including form and content. Ss will improve their ability to use English determiners accurately. Ss will be able to use resources effectively when they are unsure how to use English.

The four lesson plans are presented sequentially, with the materials for each lesson following each lesson plan.

Lesson:	**The English Business Letter – Day 1 of 4** **Introduction to the English business letter**
Enabling Objectives:	Students will read a business letter and note its distinctive features Ss will identify nouns and the determiners which mark them
Terminal Aims:	Students will be able to understand the defining features of a business letter, including form and content. Ss will be able to distinguish count vs. mass nouns
Materials:	Sample business letter handout Count versus noncount noun handout, available at: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/esl/eslcount2.html

Homework:	New homework: students are to find at least one new guide for determiners which they haven't used before, paper or electronic, and bring it to the next class. Students are welcome to bring their familiar guides for using determiners, but the idea is to have them find a new referenced source of information to share in the next class.
Hints:	Suggest a single format for writing a business letter. There are many.

Minutes:	Students are:
0 – 10	Noting the homework assignment on the overhead while the Teacher (T) takes roll. Inside circle, outside circle discussion based on the following questions on the overhead: If you could have more information about something in the world or effect a change in the world, what would it be?
5 – 15	As a class, discussing what kinds of topics they have talked about. T notes topics on the board.
15 – 25	As a class, comparing what they know about Japanese and English business letters. Listening to T introduce English business letters. Questions: • What is a business letter? • In Japanese, how can you tell a business letter from a personal letter? • Have you had to write many business letters in Japanese? In English? Listening to T tells a story or two about business letters that T actually has written. Listening to T explain how a business letter has a distinct format and displays a sample on an overhead.

Minutes:	Students are:
25 – 40	Individually, looking at the sample's format: • Flush left • One extra space between sections and no indent • Heading • Date • Inside address • Salutation • Body • Closing • Signature • Name and title
40 – 45	Listening to T Explain how the body of a business letter typically • introduces the writer • explains the reason for the letter • calls for specific action on the part of the reader Listening to T explain that a writer must consider his or her audience carefully when sending a business letter.
45 – 55	Individually, receiving the business letter and count versus noncount noun handouts and reading the sample business letter.
55 – 65	In pairs, working to answer the questions on the back of the business letter handout.
75 – 85	Individually reading over the count versus noncount nouns handout. In pairs, reading the letter again and underlining nouns. Taking the nouns they have underlined and marking them with the letter "C" for count nouns or the letter "M" for mass nouns based on their knowledge and the information on the back of the handout.
85 – 90	Writing a post-reflection in their class notebooks. Questions on the overhead: How confident do you feel using count and mass nouns? After our class discussion today, do you feel your ideas from the inside outside circle discussion could be the basis for a real business letter? Whom would you like to write a formal letter to? About what?

Sample Business Letter

Michael T. Ferry
405 W Doty St
Madison WI 53703
(608) 256-0837

April 14, 2000

0300 Small ICO
Correspondence Group
PO Box 25691
Miami Lakes FL 33102

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter in response to a 40-minute call with an AT&T representative regarding an error on my AT&T long distance bill. The error involves the rates charged on my AT&T long distance calls made between February 19th and March 16th. The AT&T representative claimed that I was casually billed for the calls because I was not an AT&T customer. He believes that the rates charged reflect the fact that an access code was dialed before I dialed the long distance numbers. I informed him that **no access code had been dialed**. I informed him that I had been using AT&T as my primary long distance carrier since August of 1999. He informed me that AT&T had no record of this.

The AT&T representative and I then spoke with a representative from Ameritech, my local telephone service provider. Ameritech stated I certainly had been a customer of AT&T since August and that it appeared I had been casually billed **in error** for those calls made between February 19th and March 16th. Ameritech refused to provide the AT&T representative with the "pick" information from the individual long distance calls. At that point, the AT&T representative informed me that I would have to make a written appeal to 0300 Small ICO Correspondence Group. I informed Ameritech and AT&T that I was contesting the charges and would not pay the AT&T long distance bill.

Please examine the enclosed AT&T long distance bills going back to start of service in August of 1999. The rates are consistent until this latest March 25th billing date. On this latest bill, per-call charges and higher rates have been applied. I can assure you, **no access code for AT&T was dialed**. I dialed calls in February and March the same way I had in previous months.

Please send me a corrected bill reflecting the appropriate rates. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about this matter.

Sincerely,

Michael T. Ferry

With a partner, answer the following questions about the business letter you have just read:

1. Who wrote the letter?
2. Whom is the letter addressed to?
3. Why has the writer written the letter?
4. What does the writer want the addressee to do?
5. Do you think the addressee will do what the writer asks? Why?
6. Write down a words, phrases, or clauses that you do not understand. Now use the surrounding context to make guesses as to what they may mean.

Lesson:	**The English Business Letter – Day 2 of 4** **Business writing with a focus on English determiners**
Enabling Objectives:	Students will practice identifying determiners Ss will hypothesize how determiners are used Ss will use determiner guides to assist their use of determiners Ss will read and listen to the requirements of the business letter assignment

Terminal Aims:	Students will be able to use determiners more accurately. Ss will understand the steps and requirements for the business letter assignment
Materials:	Sample business letter handout from previous class Count versus noncount noun handout from previous class Determining the use of Determiners handout Business letter project handouts Business letter project checklists Business letter scoring rubric handouts or location
Homework:	No homework to return. Students bring a determiners guide today. New homework is the rough draft business letter, written or typed.
Hints:	Bring a determiner guide you like, such as OWL Writing Lab's guide or the article guides (below) to using determiners. You could have these for students who forget a guide, and you can give everyone a copy. Since the letter is long, why not assign different groups different paragraphs?

Minutes:	Students are:
0 – 10	Making note of the homework assignment Writing a pre-reflection in their class notebooks based on the following questions on the overhead: What are the distinguishing features of the business letter format? What content should the body of an effective business letter contain? Who would you like to write your business letter to? How will you find their contact information?
10 – 20	Reviewing what a noun phrase and a determiner are with the teacher (T). Receiving the Determiners: Use and Form handout
20 – 45	In groups of four (randomly formed using western playing cards – e.g. four jacks form a group) Identifying nouns and determiners and recording them on the Determiners: Use and Form handout. Noticing and hypothesizing when and how to use determiners. Sending group members to write hypotheses on the board.

Minutes:	Students are:
45 – 55	In their groups of four, getting out their determiner guides – old and new, which they brought for HW. Comparing their hypotheses to the guidelines in the resources they brought. Checking rule against use in the business letter. Discussing discoveries and which are the best resources with T.
55 – 70	Individually going back in their class notebooks and revising their own determiner usage in previous writings using their new knowledge and resources.
70 – 85	Receiving the business letter assignment handout and listening to T explain the process of the assignment. Note: The scoring rubric should be made public – e.g. on the class e-conference – or handed out. Reading the handout and asking any questions they may have.
85 – 90	Post-reflection writing in their class notebooks on the following questions on the overhead: What is your plan for this project? Who will you write and why? What specifically will you ask them for? What concerns do you have about completing the project? What will you do today to address those concerns?

Determiners: Use and Form

Directions: In English, most nouns are preceded by little words called determiners. Determiners modify the nouns that follow them. For example: *Some of my first* classes were boring. You are already familiar with determiners such as possessives (my, your), demonstratives (this, that), and articles (a, the). You may need help identifying determiners which are quantifiers, such as *a lot of*.

In order to improve your ability to use English determiners accurately, let's see how Michael Ferry has used determiners in his letter to AT&T. Your task is to find nouns phrases and then find the determiners. The first sentence has been done for you. If you find no determiners, write ø (zero article) in the determiner(s) column.

The determiner(s)	The rest of noun phrase
Ø	I
This	letter
Ø	response
A	forty-minute call
An	AT&T representative
An	error
My	AT&T long distance bill

General Guidelines for Using Articles

If the noun is common:

I. Specificity

  A. Is the noun phrase **specific**? *The boys* go to school. (speaking of specific boys)
    1. Go to step II.

  B. Or is the noun phrase **generic**? *Boys* go to school. (speaking of boys in general)
    1. For singular count noun phrases use **a/an**: *An* apple is red.
    2. For plural count noun phrases use Ø: Apples are red.
    3. For noncount noun phrases use Ø: Bread is good for you.

II. Newness

  A. Is the noun phrase **new**? *A cat* sat down. (this is the first mention of a cat)
    1. Go to step III

  B. Is the noun phrase **given**? *The cat* sat down. (the cat has already been mentioned)
    1. For singular count noun phrases use **the**: *The* apple tastes good.
    2. For plural count noun phrases use **some**: *The* apples taste good.
    3. For noncount noun phrases use **the**:   Give me *the* bread.

III. Definiteness

  A. Is the noun phrase **indefinite**? I hit *a ball*. (the listener does not know which ball)
    1. For singular count noun phrases use **a/an**: I read *a* book.
    2. For plural count noun phrases use **some**: I read *some* books.
    3. For noncount noun phrases use **some**:   You have *some* money.

  B. Is the noun phrase **definite**? I hit *the ball*. (the listener knows which ball)
    1. For singular count noun phrases use **the**: I read *the book*.
    2. For plural count noun phrases use **the**:   I read *the* books.
    3. For noncount noun phrases use **the**:   You have *the* money.

If the noun is proper:

I. Is the noun phrase the **name** of a country, state, province, city, lake, mountain, island, *continent, park*, *beach*, or *person*?

  A. Use ∅: *Chicago* is on *Lake Michigan* in *America*.

II. Or is the noun phrase the **title** of a country, state, province, city, group of lakes, mountain range, group of islands, *river*, *sea*, *forest*, *jungle*, or *desert*?

  A. Use **the**: Chicago is on *The Great Lakes* in *The United States of America*.

Business Letter Project

In order to improve your written English, your ability to function in formal English language settings, and your ability to represent yourself and your goals, you are asked to compose an English business letter. When you have finished revising your letter, you will send it by post or email. Your letter should be a request for information or a request for action on the part of a person, organization, government, etc. If you would like to write a business letter on another topic, please arrange this with your teacher.

In order to refine your writing ability and product, you and your class-mates will go through a drafting process with peer review in order to develop excellent letters you can send and be proud of. The process includes:

1. brainstorming who you will write to
2. gaining information about your audience
3. outlining the content of your letter
4. drafting a letter
5. reading peer drafts as they read your draft
6. providing feedback on content and organization
7. revising your letter
8. reading peer revisions as they read your revision
9. providing feedback on structure and format
10. revising your letter for expert review
11. revising your letter using expert feedback
12. sending your letter
13. documenting the reply
14. including the documented process of your work in your writing portfolio

In order to help you complete the task and understand how your work will be assessed, you will receive an assignment checklist and a scoring rubric. Attendance and timely completion of work will be essential to developing your English writing ability and knowledge of business English. **Be sure to save all of your work and the feedback you receive during the process so that you can demonstrate the development of your letter.**

Please contact your teacher immediately in the case of questions or difficulty.

Student Checklist for the Business Letter Project

Please check off the following items when you have completed them. When you are finished, sign this sheet and fasten it as a cover sheet on the front of your project.

_____ My letter is on white, quality A4 paper in a 12 point font suitable for business. My project is fastened together in reverse chronological order (newest work on top).

_____ I have provided peers with written feedback on their rough drafts.

_____ I have provided peers with written feedback on their revisions.

_____ I have written a rough draft of my business letter; it is the last item in my packet.

_____ I have incorporated any useful written peer feedback in my revision, which is included.

_____ I have incorporated any useful written feedback from my peers and used it to create a business letter ready for expert feedback.

_____ All written feedback from my peers is included in my packet.

_____ In my letter, I have an opening, a body, and a closing.

_____ In my letter, I introduce myself, explain my purpose, and make a call for action.

_____ In I have separated my main ideas into paragraphs and sequenced them in a logical fashion.

_____ My letter is polite and takes into account the cultural practices of my audience.

_____ My letter follows the format for a business letter which we have studied in class.

_____ I have double-checked the accuracy of my English grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

_____ The content of my letter is succinct, but the body is at least 150 words in length.

Signature: _____

Name and class: _____

Scoring Rubric for the Business Letter Project

_____ **Checklist:** 0 – failed to use checklist. 1 – incomplete checklist. 2 – complete checklist.

_____ **Presentation:** 0 – papers are ripped, fastener fails, etc. making project difficult to work with. 1 – paper is of poor quality, font

is too small or large, etc. leaving a bad impression. 2- paper and print are neat and pleasing.

____ **Rough draft:** 0 – no rough draft. 1 – rough draft is only partially complete. 2 – rough draft is complete.

____ **Student feedback on peer drafts:** 0 – student failed to provide feedback on drafts. 1- student provided little and/or unhelpful feedback on drafts. 2 – student provided constructive feedback on drafts.

____ **Use of feedback in revision:** 0 – student failed to incorporate peer feedback in his/her revision. 1 – student incorporated some helpful peer feedback on his/her revision. 2 – student incorporated all helpful peer feedback in his/ her revision.

____ **Revision:** 0 – no revision. 1 – revision is only partially complete. 2 – revision is complete.

____ **Student feedback on peer revisions:** 0 – student failed to provide feedback on revisions. 1- student provided little and/or unhelpful feedback on revisions. 2 – student provided constructive feedback on revisions.

____ **Use of feedback in letter:** 0 – student failed to incorporate peer feedback in his/her letter. 1 – student incorporated some helpful peer feedback in his/her letter. 2 – student incorporated all helpful peer feedback in his/her letter.

____ **Letter:** 0 – no letter. 1 – letter is only partially complete. 2 – letter is complete.

____ **Opening and closing:** 0 – no opening and closing. 1 – opening and closing are weak or one is missing. 2 – strong opening and closing.

____ **Organization:** 0 – letter lacks paragraphing. 1 – paragraphs fails to organize main ideas. 2 – main ideas are intelligently organized in paragraphs.

____ **Coherence:** 0 – letter is confusing. 1 – letter is a little difficult to follow, perhaps due to ineffective transitions. 2 – letter is easy to follow because ideas develop in a sensible way.

____ **Content:** 0 – letter fails to state the who, the why, and the what. 1 – letter is missing: the who, the why, or the what. 2 – letter states who is writing, why, and what action is called for.

____ **Appropriateness:** 0 – informal language and/or tone ruin the letter. 1 – informal language and/or tone hurt the letter. 2 – letter is formal and polite.

____ **Cultural awareness:** 0 – awkward language makes the content feel like a bad translation from another language. 1 – some language marks the writer as ignorant of the audience's culture. 2 – language demonstrates awareness of the audience's culture.

____ **Format:** 0 – margins, spacing, etc. are non-standard. 1 – aspects of the formatting damage the professional appearance of the letter. 2 – format is attractive and professional.

____ **Grammar:** 0 – errors make the letter too difficult to read. 1 – errors are distracting. 2 – accurate usage allows the reader to focus on content.

____ **Spelling and punctuation:** 0 – frequent errors make the letter difficult to read. 1 – some avoidable errors are distracting. 2 – few to no errors allow the reader to focus on the writer's message.

____ **Length:** 0 – body of the letter is much shorter than 150 words. 1 – body is a little shorter than 150 words. 2 – body is at least 150 words, yet succinct.

____ **Directions:** 0 – project displays little or no attention to directions. 1- project follows most directions. 2 – project follows all directions.

____ **Total × 2.5 = ____ / 100**

Comments to the writer:

Lesson:	**The English Business Letter – Day 3 of 4** **Peer review workshop on content and organization**
Enabling Objectives:	Students will review appropriate language for feedback Ss will work together and offer constructive feedback Ss will read and comment on each other's work – focusing on content, organization, and use of determiners.
Terminal Aims:	Students will improve their ability to use appropriate language for feedback Ss will improve their ability to work together and provide constructive feedback Ss will be able to revise their writing to create stronger business letters
Materials:	3 peer review rough draft half-sheets for each student
Homework:	No homework to return. Students must bring a draft business letter to class today. New homework is to revise their drafts and bring a revision to the next class.
Hints:	Students will work in groups of four. This means each student will work with a partner three times, so managing a roughly equal time for each pair is important. Explain to the students that they should balance depth of feedback with getting different points of view on their writing. If they need more time, for example, allow each student to work with two teammates over the course of the class instead of three. If students are shy or need more structure, you may number them and make a chart on the overhead which specifies who works with whom during each of the three periods.

Minutes:	Students are:
0 – 10	Making note of the homework assignment Participating in the pre-reflection in the inside outside circle discussion: What factors make you more likely to accept a suggestion? What is a mistake a person could make in providing someone with feedback? What differences are you aware of between appropriate feedback in Japanese and English?

Minutes:	Students are:
10 – 20	Participating in a brief discussion and teacher lecture on appropriate feedback in English.
20 – 25	Taking out their rough draft homework Forming groups of four based on playing card suits Picking up their peer feedback (PF) half-sheets
25 – 45	In groups of four, reviewing a group mate's draft. Writing written feedback to a group mate on PF sheets Exchanging and discussing written feedback If there is time, editing their drafts
45 – 65	In groups of four, reviewing a second mate's draft. Writing written feedback to a group mate on PF sheets Exchanging and discussing written feedback If there is time, editing their drafts
65 – 85	In groups of four, reviewing a third mate's draft. Writing written feedback to a group mate on PF sheets Exchanging and discussing written feedback If there is time, editing their drafts
85 – 90	Wrapping up, asking questions, and listening to teacher feedback

Rough Draft Peer Feedback

Name: _____ Class: _____ Student number: _____

Please answer the following questions for your classmate. Remember to save these sheets!
1. Does the writer introduce him or herself?
2. Does the writer explain why he or she is writing?
3. Does the writer make a specific call for action?
4. Is the purpose of the letter clear?
5. Is the writer's request compelling? Why or why not?
6. Check the writer's use of determiners. Can you suggest any corrections?

Lesson:	**The English Business Letter – Day 4 of 4** **Peer review workshop on accuracy and format**
Enabling Objectives:	Students will engage in peer editing – both written and verbal Ss will review the requirements of the business letter project
Terminal Aims:	Students will improve their English communication and team work skills while gaining suggestions for improving their business letter. Ss will be able to use English determiners more effectively. Ss will feel confident about what they need to do to complete the business letter project and earn a satisfactory mark.
Materials:	3 revision peer feedback half sheets for each student
Homework:	Students bring a revision today. New homework: students polish their revisions into clean, typed, final copies of their letters. Each student needs to put his or her final letter on top of their revision with comments, peer review sheet, rough-draft, and in-class writing. In this way, students create a business letter packet in reverse-chronological order, with the checklist on the front of the packet. The packet should be fastened together should demonstrate the author's progress using the drafting and peer-review process.
Hints:	Walk around and helps groups and individuals.

Minutes:	Students are:
0 – 10	Making note of the homework assignment Writing a pre-reflection in their class notebook: What did you do well during the last class' peer review? What could you do better? Did you have communication problems with anyone? Why or why not? Write down a strategy you use to communicate in a positive manner. How can you be a better team member and peer reviewer today?

Minutes:	Students are:
10 – 20	Listening to the teacher (T) • review purpose, audience, content, and organization with regard to business letters. • review recent grammar points, esp. determiners • review the format of a business letter. • explain proof-reading and provide tips for specific things to look for in their peers' letters. Asking any questions they may have.
20 – 25	Picking up three revision peer review half sheets each and getting into the same groups of four as last class. Participating in a proof-reading session.
25 – 45	In groups of four, reviewing a group mate's revision. Writing written feedback to a group mate on PF sheets Exchanging and discussing written feedback If there is time, editing their revisions
45 – 65	In groups of four, reviewing a group mate's revision. Writing written feedback to a group mate on PF sheets Exchanging and discussing written feedback If there is time, editing their revisions
65 – 85	In groups of four, reviewing a group mate's revision. Writing written feedback to a group mate on PF sheets Exchanging and discussing written feedback If there is time, editing their revisions
85 – 90	Wrapping up, asking questions, and listening to teacher suggestions

Revision Peer Feedback

Name: _____ Class: _____ Student number: _____

Please answer the following questions for your classmate. Remember to save these sheets!
1. Does the letter provide the date?
2. Does the letter have the full address of the writer and the addressee?
3. Does the letter have the appropriate, "To whom it may concern," "Dear Sir or Madam," etc.?

4. Does every sentence begin with a capital letter and end with a period or question mark?
5. Does every sentence have a noun and a verb?
6. Make a note where the writer may have misused determiners in noun phrases.
7. Make a note of grammar, spelling, and punctuation that you think may be in error.
8. Has the writer signed his or her letter?

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