

Lesson No. 02

Articles

KEY POINTS

Articles

There are two types of articles: the **definite article (the)** and the **indefinite articles (a, an)**.

The indefinite article (a, an) is usually used first to point out a noun such as a person or thing. By doing that, it doesn't have to be clear about which particular person or thing is being referred to. When the same person or thing is mentioned again,

the definite article (the) is introduced to indicate the person or thing that has already been mentioned.

zero article. Sometimes, not any one of the articles is used.

Article a is used before nouns that begin with a consonant.

Article an is used before nouns that begin a vowel or vowel sound (an hour)

Article the is used for all nouns that have been mentioned earlier.

Articles are a kind of adjectives as they precede and modify the noun that follows them. Commonly, an article appears before a descriptive adjective that modifies a noun in a sentence as the following examples show.

Examples:

a bright moon

an easy life

the narrow road

Where an article is not used before a noun, a partitive word can be used instead. A partitive word is used to indicate that only a part of a whole is referred to.

Examples:

a slice of meat / Not: a meat

a chunk of cheese / Not: a cheese

a lump of coal / Not: a coal

a piece of scrap metal / Not: a scrap metal

Definite article: the

Identifies a definite or particular noun that has been mentioned earlier. It is not about a noun that has not been mentioned beforehand or a noun that we are unaware of.

Examples:

He watched **a movie**. **The movie** was about the death of a ghost.

(The movie mentioned in the second sentence is clear as it refers to the movie he watched.)

I saw an old man with **an eagle**. **The eagle** perched on his right shoulder.

(The second sentence is correct: **an eagle** becomes **the eagle**.)

We use the:

Examples:

- When there is only one such person, place or thing
the Pope, the President of the United States, the North Pole, the earth, the sky
- Before names of famous buildings, etc.:
the Eiffel Tower, the Great Wall of China
- Before a singular noun that refers to a whole class or group of people or things
the middle class, the homeless, the Canadians, the Hindus
- Before the special names of rivers, seas, oceans, mountain ranges, group of islands
the Nile, the Dead Sea, the Pacific Ocean, the Himalayas
- Before certain organizations, political parties, and countries
the United Nations, the Republican Party, the USSR, the UAR
- Before nouns such as places which we know of
We arrived early at **the ferry terminal** for our trip to **the island**.

We went to **the cinema**, after which we went to **the stadium** for a football match.

- Before abbreviations and initials of countries
the BBC (the British Broadcasting Corporation), the EEC (the European Economic Community)
the UAR, the UK, the USA, the USSR

Indefinite Article: a, an

The indefinite articles **a** and **an** are used to introduce something that has not been mentioned before. They are not used before a plural noun.

When **a** is used before a noun, it does not refer to that one particular noun; it uses this noun as representing all the others.

A house in that new housing estate should have at least three bedrooms. (The article **a** does not point out this one house but all houses in that housing estate.)

We use a:

Examples:

- when we mention something for the first time

I saw **a fairy**.

- before a word which begins with a consonant

There is **a policeman** waiting for you.

- before a word with a long sound of u

a university, a uniform, a useful book, a European, a unique design

It would be **a unique** opportunity to travel in space.

- before the word one because one sounds as if it begins with a W (wun)

a one-way street, a one-eyed monster, a one-year course, a one-week holiday

I have **a one-way** ticket to travel from one place to another.

- The indefinite article **a** also means **one**. We can use **a** or **one** as follow:

Examples:

He keeps **a/one dozen** snakes as pets.

I have told you **a/one hundred** times to leave me alone!

- Sometimes, it is better to use **a** instead of **one**.

Examples:

She wiped up the vomit with **a mop**.

Better than: She wiped up the vomit with **one mop**.

He had **a bath** before he went to bed.

Better than: He had **one bath** before he went to bed.

- We can use **a** before a proper noun.

Examples:

A **Mr Ali** called to ask when you are going to give back the borrowed money.

I still remember it was on **a December** morning when I drove through the fog into a tree.

We use an

Examples:

- Before a noun which begins with a vowel sound

They say **an apple** a day keeps the doctor away.

- Before a singular noun (person or thing) to mean **only one** in quantity

She's **an only child**.

- Before a noun that is representative of a group, species, etc

An ostrich has only two toes on each foot.

- Before a noun that begins with a silent **h**

an hour, an honest man, an heir, an honour, an honourable man

It is going to close in **an hour's** time.

I can't read your writing. Is this **an h** or what?

- Before abbreviations, some of which begin with a consonant

I have **an X-ray** on my lungs.

I saw **an UFO** hovering above my kitchen.
He wanted to be **an MP** but was not elected for the past twelve years.

Zero Article

Articles are not always necessary.
No article is used when making generalization with plural countable nouns and singular uncountable nouns.

Examples:

Flying is far safer than driving. (Uncountable noun)
Cars are still expensive for lower-income people. (Countable noun)

Examples:

He travels to work by train.
Not: He travels to work by **a/the train**.
She loves taking photos of caterpillars.
Not: She loves taking photos of **the caterpillars**..

Zero article:

Examples:

- Before name of materials

Gold is found in Australia.
Not: **The gold** is found in Australia.
They are mining for tin.
Not: They are mining for **the tin**.

- Before abstract nouns used in a general sense

Money cannot buy happiness.
Not: Money cannot buy **the happiness**.
We always expect total honesty from our employees.
Not: We always expect **the total honesty** from our employees.

- Before proper nouns

He is a fan of Michael Jackson.
Not: He is a fan of **the Michael Jackson**.
She gave birth to twins in June.
Not: She gave birth to twins in **the June**.

- Before illness

She came down with measles and had to stay in bed.
Not: She came down with **the measles** and had to stay in bed.
Our family doctor suffers from asthma.
Not: Our family doctor suffers from **the asthma**.

- Before the name of cities, states, countries, islands, or mountains

India achieved independence in 1947.
Not: **The india** achieved independence in 1947.
Mount Everest is the world's highest mountain.
Not: **The Mount Everest** is the world's highest mountain.

Articles before Countable and Uncountable Nouns

A, an

A and **an** have the same meaning and as they both mean **one**, they are used only before a singular countable noun (**a hat**). We do not place either of them before a plural noun or an uncountable noun.

Examples:

He who kills animals illegally is **a poacher**.
His father works as **an accountant** in a multi-national company.

The

We use **the** before the following types of nouns:

Examples:

Singular countable noun

The serial killer has struck again.

Plural countable noun

Rebel forces killed two of **the soldiers**.

Uncountable noun

The sand blown by strong wind covered the entire area.

Proper noun

The Khan family you have been waiting for has arrived.

Zero Article

we use the zero article before the following types of nouns:

Examples:

Plural countable noun

Dogs bark all the time.

Most of them who spend time at this coastal resort are **tourists**.

Uncountable noun (always singular)

Rice is currently in short supply in the province.

Drug overdose caused his death.

Proper noun

Rome is a great city.

Her first language is **English**.

Same noun used with all three articles conveys different meaning:

Examples:

He is **at a school**. (We don't know which school.)

He is **at the school**. (We know which school.)

He is **at school**. (He is a teacher or student and is teaching or learning.)

I buy **the paper** every day. (Newspaper)

The professor presented **a paper** on recent findings about cancer cells. (A piece of writing)

The children are learning the art of folding **paper** into decorative objects. (Material)

It helps to observe the following:

Examples:

(1) When we use two or more adjectives to describe the same person or thing, we use the article only before the first adjective.

He talked to **a tall and blonde woman**.

(He talked to a [one] woman who was tall and blonde.)

(2) When we use two or more adjectives to refer to more than one person or thing, we use the article before each adjective.

He talked to **a tall and a blonde woman**.

(He talked to two women, one of whom was tall and the other was a blonde.)

Position of an article in a sentence

Each of the articles – **a, an, the** – can be used before a **countable noun**. Unlike **a** and **an**, the article **the** can come before an **uncountable noun**. The three articles are commonly used to begin a sentence. There are some words that can be used before the articles.

Articles before a countable noun.

The three articles are used here before a countable noun or before an adjective followed by a noun. The nouns used here are **goal, priest, apple, friend, fireworks, and building**.

Examples:

A last-minute goal put them through to the final. (Last-minute is an adjective)

A priest was called in to exorcise the ghost.

An apple a day is a must after dinner.

An old friend of mine was released from prison last week.

The high-rise building was gutted by fire.
The bright meteor lit up the sky.

Article before an uncountable noun.

The is the only article that is used before an uncountable noun. It can be anywhere in a sentence except at the end. The uncountable nouns used here are **butter, flesh, sand, snow, cream, and skin.**

Examples:

The butter melted in the heat.

The flesh of the fruit is white.

The sand was then mixed to the cement.

They are playing in **the** snow.

The sales person claimed **the** cream made **the** skin age more slowly.

We cannot use **a** before an uncountable noun, but we can if we have a measured quantity of the uncountable noun. For example, it's wrong to say or write **a** cheese. Instead, we can use **a chunk/hunk/lump/piece/slice of cheese.**

Examples:

A block of ice

A cube of sugar

A hunk of cheese

A layer of dirt

A piece of cloth

A pinch of salt

A slice of bread

Words that come before the articles.

Examples:

Many **a** time he would talk when his mouth was full.

Half **an** orange is not enough for me.

What **an** awful lot of difference it will make to my life if I fail the exam.

All **the** puppies got stolen.

Both **the** papers had difficult and stupid questions.