

Mentouri Constantine University

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Department of Arabic

Module: English

Level: First Year Students (Group 14-A & 14-B) -3-

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DEFINITE and INDEFINITE ARTICLES: the, a, an

The words ‘a’, ‘an’ and ‘the’, known as articles, present problems for most speakers of English as an additional language. This is not surprising, since there is no equivalent construction in many languages, and those languages that do have articles do not necessarily use them in the same way as English.

Introduction

It is often difficult to decide whether an English noun needs an article before it, and, if so, which article (a/an/the) to use. The main things to consider when choosing an article are whether or not the noun is countable, and whether it is definite.

Countability means that the noun can be made plural, e.g. book/books. This is something you can check in a learner’s

dictionary of English. Whether a noun is **definite or indefinite** depends on whether you and your reader or listener both know what you are referring to. Much of the information is based on the work of Master (1986) and Swales and Feak (1994).

What is an article?

Basically, The English language uses articles to identify nouns. Articles act much like adjectives. Articles clarify whether a noun is specific or general, singular or plural. An article appears before the noun it accompanies.

There are two types of articles :

- ✓ The **definite** article is **the**.
- ✓ The **indefinite** article is **a / an**.

1- The indefinite article a or an:

General rules:

Rule01: The article **a / an** is used when we don't specify the things or people we are talking about:

Examples:

- I met **a** friend.
- I work in **a** factory in New York.
- I borrowed **a** pencil from a passenger sitting next to me.

Rule02: The indefinite article -a- is used before a consonant sound:

Examples:

- a dog.
- a pilot
- a teacher.
- a university

NOTE: Although the word 'university' starts with the vowel 'u', it is not pronounced as such. It is pronounced as a consonant sound /ju:.niv3:.si.ti/

Rule 03: The indefinite article /an/ is used before a vowel sound:

Examples:

- An engineer.
- An elephant.
- An athlete: a person who is proficient in sports and other forms of physical exercise.

2- The definite article /the/:

- It's used when the speaker talks about a specific object that both the person speaking and the listener know.

EXAMPLES:

- **The** car over there is fast.
- **The** president of the United States is giving a speech tonight.

- When we speak of something or someone for the first time we use /a/ or /an/, the next time we repeat that object we use the definite article /the/.

EXAMPLES:

- ✚ I live in a house. **The** house is quite old and has four bedrooms.
- ✚ I ate in a Chinese restaurant. **The** restaurant was very good.

3-No article:

1. Do not use an article with countries, states, counties or provinces, lakes and mountains except when the country is a collection of states such as "The United States".

- He lives in **Washington** near **Mount Rainier**.
- They live in **Northern British Columbia**.
- They climbed **Mount Everest**.

2. We do not normally use an article with plurals **and uncountable nouns** to talk about things in general:

- He writes books.
- She likes sweets.
- Do you like jazz music?
- She ate bread with butter in the morning.

Countable and uncountable nouns

Using English articles with countable and uncountable nouns may be confusing.

The can be used with uncountable nouns, or the article can be dropped entirely as mentioned above.

- 1. "The two countries reached **the** peace after a long disastrous war" (some specific peace treaty) or "The two countries reached peace after a long disastrous war" (any peace).

- 2. "He drank **the** water" (some specific water- for example, the water his wife brought him from the kitchen) or "He drank water." (any water)

It is unusual to use **a/an** for uncountable nouns. You can't say "I'd like a milk"

a/an can be used only with countable nouns.

- I'd like **a** piece of cake.
- 2. I lent him a book.
- 3. I drank **a** cup of tea.

Grammar Exercise - Definite and Indefinite Articles

Choose the correct definite or indefinite article: "the", "a", "an" or "x" (zero article).

1. I bought pair of shoes.
2. I saw movie last night.
3. They are staying athotel.
4. Look atwoman over there! She is a famous actress.
5. I do not likebasketball.
6. That isgirl I told you about.
7.night is quiet. Let's take a walk!
8.price of gas keeps rising.
9. John traveled toMexico.
10. Juan isSpanish.
11. I read amazing story yesterday.
12. My brother doesn't eat chicken.
13. I live inapartment. apartment is new.
15. I would like piece of cake.
16. I was in Japanese restaurant..... restaurant served good food.
17. Sara can play..... guitar.

Grammar Exercise - Definite Article /Zero Article.

Definite article (the) or zero article (X)

1. Did you get married after leaving university ?
2. I was..... at train station when you called me.
3. I..... left work at six o'clock pm.
4. They are openingnew shops here.
5. She was returning fromschool when I met her.
6. She has a strong alibi. She was at..... cinema at the moment the crime was committed.
7. Are you going tobeach this afternoon?
8. He went to..... prison for domestic violence.
9. The kids are sitting at..... table eating cereals.
10. Are you athome?

Answers

1. I bought **a** pair of shoes.
2. I saw **a** movie last night.
3. They are staying at **a** hotel.
4. Look at **the** woman over there! She is a famous actress.
5. I do not like **X** basketball.
6. That is **the** girl I told you about.
7. **The** night is quiet. Let's take a walk!
8. **The** price of gas keeps rising.
9. John traveled to **X** Mexico.
10. Juan is **X** Spanish.
11. I read **an** amazing story yesterday.
12. My brother does not eat **X** chicken.
13. I live in **an** apartment. **The** apartment is new.
14. I would like **a** piece of cake.
15. I was in **a** Japanese restaurant. **The** restaurant served good food.
16. Sara can play **the** guitar.
17. Did you get married after leaving **X** university ?
18. I was at **the** train station when you called me.

19. I left **X** work at six o'clock pm.
20. They are opening **X** new shops here.
21. She was returning from **X** school when I met her.
22. She has a strong alibi. She was at **the** cinema at the moment the crime was committed.
24. Are you going to **the** beach this afternoon?
25. He went to **X** prison for domestic violence.
26. The kids are sitting at **the** table eating cereals.
27. Are you at **X** home?

Fill in: THE, A, AN or ----- (no article)

1. _____ boys like playing with cars.
2. _____ Amazon is South America's largest river.
3. I never listen to _____ radio. In fact, I haven't even got _____ radio.
4. What _____ amazing idea he had yesterday evening.
5. _____ rich should do more to help _____ poor.
6. My dad always liked to go to _____ school.
7. Did you see the film on _____ television or at _____ cinema?
8. There's half _____ litre of milk left in _____ fridge.

9. _____ Uncle Norman and _____ Aunt Lydia stayed with us over the weekend.
10. Austria was ruled by _____ Habsburgs for many centuries.
11. Dad told us to go to _____ bed at ten.
12. What's _____ highest mountain on _____ earth?
13. I met _____ few American tourists when I was in Italy.
14. _____ earth moves around _____ sun every 365 days.
15. _____ Soviet Union was _____ first country to send _____ human being into _____ space.
16. I had to stay in _____ hospital for two weeks in order to recover.
17. _____ oranges and apples have a lot of vitamins.
18. This is _____ most wonderful present I've ever had.
19. _____ President Bush is from Texas.
20. I'm not very hungry. I had _____ big breakfast
21. Peter lives in Tokyo, _____ capital of Japan.
22. In Britain, drinking _____ tea is more common than drinking _____ coffee.
23. She is such _____ clever girl. She's bound to go to _____ university later on.
24. It was _____ long journey. We were at _____ sea for two months.

25. _____ women are often said to be better teachers than _____ men.

KEY

1. --- boys like playing with cars.
2. **The** Amazon is South America's largest river.
3. I never listen to **the** radio. In fact, I haven't even got a radio.
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