

The Indefinite Article

To facilitate pronunciation, **a** is used in front of any word that begins with a **consonant or consonant-like vowel** sound.

an is put in front of any word that begins with a pure vowel sound or a mute 'h'.

Note that spelling is *not* a reliable indicator of when to use **a** or **an**.

The indefinite article **a or an** is placed in front of a **countable noun** that is being mentioned for the very first time. Once introduced, all further references to it can be preceded by the definite article **the**.

In English, an indefinite article is needed in front of professions.

The indefinite article can also be used instead of *per* when giving the rate or pace of something.

Note too that *little* and *few* become a whole lot more positive when preceded by the indefinite article!

Our town has a theatre, a university, a large park and a conference hall.

Many Chinese still believe an Englishman always carries an umbrella.

It's an old custom.

It's a strange old custom.

The coastguard received an SOS.

He spent an hour standing in line.

I have two cars: a Ford and an Audi.

The Ford is white and the Audi is silver.

She is an architect and he is a doctor.

He earns \$200 a day.

She swims twice a week.

He drove at 60 miles an hour.

She has a little money and a few friends, so she'll probably get by.

Compare:

She has little money and few friends, so I doubt if she'll get by.

The Definite Article

The definite article **the** is used in front of any noun the listener or reader already knows about.

The is also used when the existence of something is common knowledge or comes as no surprise because of the context in which it is mentioned.

The definite article is used in front of things generally regarded as unique.

Because nouns preceded by **superlative adjectives** and **ordinal numbers** are by their very nature unique, they too require the definite article.

Exception:

I have two cars: a Ford and an Audi.

The Ford is white and the Audi is silver.

Last week a fighter plane crashed into a field but the pilot managed to eject safely.

Yesterday I spent the afternoon at home.

I threw my work clothes into the washing machine and went outside to sit in the garden.

The sun, the moon, the sea, the sky, the Arctic environment, the capital, the air, the ground, etc.

It was the worst day of my life!

The captain was the first person to leave the battleship tanker.

Spoken American English drops *the* in dates.

The definite article is used in front of countable nouns representing a whole class or category of something.

The is used in front of oceans, seas, rivers, island and mountain chains, deserts, countries with plural names, and noun forms of points of the compass.

The is used in titles and place names including *of*.

In the case of official job titles, *the* is usually dropped if there is only one such incumbent at any given time.

The is also used in proper names consisting of noun(s) and/or adjective(s) + noun.

The is used in hotel names.

The is used for newspapers.

The is used for many larger organizations and institutions (not [enterprises](#)), including those with initials that are normally spelled out.

Acronyms (initials read as whole words) are treated in the same way as regular names ([proper nouns](#)) and so do not require any article. If you are uncertain, please monitor usage in the media or consult a dictionary.

The is used for currencies.

In front of people's names, however, *the* is only used to avoid confusion.

The is used with the names of musical instruments.

The can be used instead of a possessive form when referring to parts of the body and items of clothing.

Many forms of entertainment are preceded by the definite article *the*, but not the medium of television.

BrE June the twenty-first. The twenty-first (d)
AmE June twenty-first.

The computer has changed our lives.

It is left up to the consumer to decide which or

We all have a duty to look after the old and inf

The blue whale is thought to be the largest ani
have lived.

The Pacific, the Mediterranean, the Amazon,
the West Indies, the Rockies, the Sahara,
the Netherlands, the Far East, etc.

It is unlikely the Queen of Denmark has
ever swum in the Bay of Bengal.

Margrethe II is (the) Queen of Denmark.

Donald was elected chairman of the board.

The Empire State Building, the English Chann
White House, the Royal Festival Hall, the Rol
the Berlin Philharmonic (Orchestra), the Britis
the Titanic, etc.

The Hilton Hotel, the Savoy, the Sheraton

The Times, the Baltimore Sun, the Australian

The Commonwealth, the Fed, the EU, the WH
the FDA, the IAEA, etc.

Compare:

OPEC, NATO, ICANN, etc.

The U.S. dollar has risen against the yen
but fallen against the euro.

I'm the David Appleyard that lives in Japan.

Richard Clayderman plays the piano.

She was hit on the head by a snowball
(= a snowball hit her head).

Joe grabbed the youth by the collar
(= Joe grabbed the youth's collar).

I go to the cinema/movies, the theatre,
the circus, the ballet and the opera.

In the daytime I listen to the radio,
but in the evenings I prefer to watch t

Following are some of the most important guidelines listed above, with example sentences:

1. You use an uncount noun with no article if you mean all or any of that thing.
 - I need help!
 - I don't eat cheese.
 - Do you like music?
2. You use **the** with an uncount noun when you are talking about a particular example of that thing.
 - Thanks for the help you gave me yesterday.
 - I didn't eat the cheese. It was green!
 - Did you like the music they played at the dance?
3. You usually use **a/an** with a count noun the first time you say or write that noun.
 - Can I borrow a pencil, please?
 - There's a cat in the garden!
 - Do you have an mp3 player?
4. You use **the** with count nouns the second and subsequent times you use the noun, or when the listener already knows what you are referring to (maybe because there is only one of that thing).
 - Where's the pencil I lent you yesterday?
 - I think the cat belongs to the new neighbours.
 - I dropped the mp3 player and it broke.
 - Please shut the door!
5. You use a plural count noun with no article if you mean all or any of that thing.
 - I don't like dogs.
 - Do they have children?
 - I don't need questions. Give me answers!
6. The above rules apply whether there is or there is not an adjective in front of the noun.
 - I don't eat German cheese.
 - Can I borrow a red pencil, please?
 - There's an extremely large cat in the garden!
 - I don't like small, noisy children.

The Zero Article

No article is needed before abstract nouns used in a general sense.

Love is all you need.

No article is needed for most places consisting of just the name of a person, or the name of a person/place followed by a noun.

Crime is a growing problem in the inner cities.
Harrods, Macys, McDonald's, Lloyds Bank, St. Paul's Cathedral, Buckingham Palace, Kennedy Airport

No article is usually needed in front of company names.

An article is unnecessary in official job titles if there is only one person holding this position at any given time.

No article is needed in front of *most* roads, streets, parks, squares or bridges.

No article is needed in the names of single mountains, only mountain ranges.

No article is needed before the names of meals, unless it is a formal occasion.

No article is needed for the names of games or sports.

No article is needed before *bed, church, court, hospital, prison, school, college, university*, etc. when these are used for their primary purpose.

If, however, they are used for any other purposes, *the* is required.

Articles are not needed in more abstract expressions of situation like *to/at sea, to/at/out of work, in/out of town, in/out of office*, etc.

If, however, you start talking about somewhere concrete or some place in particular, then the definite article *the* is required.

No article is needed before television as a medium, only as an appliance.

There is no article before a noun followed by a categorizing letter or number.

Station, Cambridge University, etc.

Cisco Systems, Microsoft, CBS, EMI, Hitachi, L
Facebook, etc

George Osborne is (the) Chancellor of

Compare:

George Osborne is a Cabinet minister.

Oxford Street, Orchard Road, Central Park,
Square, Tower Bridge, etc.

While in New Zealand I climbed Mount Cook,
the highest peak in the Southern Alps.

Roger had breakfast in his hotel room.

Compare:

I attended a dinner at the Rotary Club.

Anna Kournikova plays tennis to keep in shape.

She stayed in bed on Sunday morning
instead of going to church.

The angry customer threatened to take him.

The aging dissident was released from prison.

After graduating from high school he went to ..

Compare:

She sat on the bed while she changed her socks.

He entered the church to photograph its interior.

The students have just read section C.

The Chicago train is about to depart from track 5

Her flight leaves from gate 32.

He fell asleep on page 816 of "War and Peace".

She is staying in room 689.

To give added punch, articles are often dropped in the titles of books, movies, music and other works of art. "*Journey into Hell*" sounds even more thrilling than "*The Journey into Hell*".

Even if an article exists in the original title, as in J.R.R. Tolkien's "*The Lord of the Rings*", people tend to omit this when making reference to it in everyday speech or writing.

To save space and boost impact, articles are usually dropped in headlines.

"Have you read '*Lord of the Rings*' right through?"

"Iraqi Head Seeks Arms"

"Stolen Painting Found by Tree"

"Police Confirm Shotgun Attack on Bullet Train"