

Definite and Indefinite Articles

What is an article?

Basically, **articles** are either *definite* or *indefinite*. They combine to a noun to indicate the type of reference being made by the noun.

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

A and AN are called indefinite articles. "Indefinite" means "not specific". Use A (AN) when you are talking about a thing in general, NOT a specific thing.

Examples:

- I need **a** phone. *Not a specific phone, any phone*
- Mark wants **a** bicycle. *Not a particular bicycle, a bicycle in general*
- Do you have **a** driver's license? *In general*

Use A(AN) when talking about a thing which is new, unknown, or introduced to a listener for the first time. Also use A(AN) when you are asking about the existence of something.

Examples:

- I have **a** car. *The car is being introduced for the first time.*
- Tom is **a** teacher. *This is new information to the listener.*
- Is there **a** dictionary in your backpack? *Asking about the existence of the dictionary*

Similarly, use A(AN) to introduce what type of thing we are talking about.

Examples:

- That is **an** excellent book. *Describing the kind of book*
- Do you live in **a** big house? *Asking about the kind of house*
- I ate **a** thick, juicy steak. *Describing the kind of steak*

REMEMBER: You cannot use A(AN) with plural nouns because A(AN) means "one" or "a single".

Examples:

- I saw **a** bears in Yellowstone National Park. **Not Correct**
- I saw bears in Yellowstone National Park. **Correct**

THE is called a definite article. "Definite" means "specific". Use **THE** when talking about something which is already known to the listener or which has been previously mentioned, introduced, or discussed.

Examples:

- I have a cat. **The** cat is black.
- There is a book in my backpack. **The** book is very heavy.
- Do you know where I left **the** car keys? *The listener knows which specific car keys you are talking about.*
- Do you own a car? Is **the** car blue? *You assume they do have a car after asking about it in the first sentence.*
- Nobody lives on **the** Moon. *The Moon is known to everyone.*

IMPORTANT: You can use **THE** with both singular nouns and plural nouns.

Examples:

- I saw **the** bear in Yellowstone National Park. **Correct**
- I saw **the** bears in Yellowstone National Park. **Correct**

Many clauses and phrases make the noun known to the listener by telling the listener which person or thing we are talking about. Let's look at an example sentence:

Can you give me **the** book *on the table*.

We use **THE** in this sentence because the phrase "on the table" tells the listener which book we are referring to. We are not talking about other books, we are talking about a specific book that the listener

can see or already knows about. Learning to recognize such identifying clauses and phrases will help you use *THE* correctly.

Examples:

- Did you read **the** book *which I gave you*?
- He didn't like **the** movie *that you suggested*.
- He loved **the** dessert *with chocolate and cherries*.
- **The** phone *on my desk* belongs to Ken.
- Did you know **the** man *who was talking to Leonie*?

HOWEVER: Not all clauses and phrases make the noun known to the listener. Some are simply descriptive. They add extra information, but they do not tell the listener which specific thing we are talking about.

Examples:

- He bought **the** house *with a big backyard*. *This combination tells the listener which specific house he bought.*
- He bought **a** house *with a big backyard*. *This combination tells the listener what kind of house he bought, but not the specific house he bought.*

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)

Complete the following sentences using a definite or indefinite article. (a) (An) (the) (no article)

He eats a lot of _____ meat.

_____ food that you cooked was very good!

_____ cell phones do not cause cancer.

He has always been _____ very good boy.

Let's go to _____ beach.

Let's play _____ volleyball.

He knows how to treat _____ lady.

I've been waiting for _____ long time.

_____ only jazz musician I like is Miles Davis.

We went out for..... meal last night. restaurant we went to was excellent.

Did police find..... person who stole your bicycle?

I'm looking for..... job

Did Ann get..... job she applied for?

This is..... nice house. Has it got..... garden?

It was warm and sunny, so we decided to sit in..... garden

Would you like..... apple?

Could you close..... door, please?

We live in..... small flat near..... centre of the city.

Have you finished with..... book I lent you last week?

My mother is..... doctor and my father is..... Author

Do you have dictionary? I don't have one, and I need to look up..... word.

There's big bear in backyard. I think bear is looking for something to eat.

Mt. Hood is volcano in Oregon. It's very beautiful mountain.

Sam recommended book to Lisa. She didn't like book at all.

Do you have vacuum? I dropped piece of cake, and I need to clean it up.

Honey, where's vacuum? I can't find it. It was in closet, but now it's not there.

Do you have dictionary? I don't have one, and I need to look up word.

Do you have passport? You need passport to travel outside of country.

Do you have computer? I have laptop and iPad.

I had egg and glass of milk for breakfast.

..... leopard which escaped from zoo has been caught.

Have you finished reading book you borrowed last week?

This is story you will enjoy.

..... girl you met is my niece.