

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**.

The indefinite article *a* or *an*:

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



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

The indefinite article **a** is used before a consonant sound:

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

NOTE:

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

The indefinite article **an** is used before a vowel sound:

- **an** engineer.
- **an** elephant.
- **an** athlete

The definite article *the*:

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

- **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**.

- 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.

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.

1. 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

Do the exercise below on definite and indefinite articles and click on the answer button to check your answers.

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 at hotel.
4. Look at woman over there! She is a famous actress.
5. I do not like basketball.
6. That is girl I told you about.
7. night is quiet. Let's take a walk!
8. price of gas keeps rising.
9. John traveled to Mexico.
10. Juan is Spanish.
11. I read amazing story yesterday.
12. My brother doesn't eat chicken.
13. love is such beautiful thing.
14. I live in apartment. 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

Do the exercise below on *articles* and click on the button to check your answers.

(Before doing the exercises you may want to read the lesson on [articles](#))

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 opening new shops here.
5. She was returning from school 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 to beach this afternoon?
8. He went to prison for domestic violence.
9. The kids are sitting at table eating cereals.
10. Are you at home?

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. X ✓ love is such a ✓ beautiful thing.
14. I live in an ✓ apartment. The ✓ apartment is new.
15. I would like a ✓ piece of cake.
16. I was in a ✓ Japanese restaurant. The ✓ restaurant served good food.
17. Sara can play the ✓ guitar.
18. Did you get married after leaving X ✓ university ?
19. I was at the ✓ train station when you called me.
20. I left X ✓ work at six o'clock pm.
21. They are opening X ✓ new shops here.
22. She was returning from X ✓ school when I met her.
23. 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?