

Topic: using definite, indefinite and zero articles.

1. Articles in English

How many articles are there in English?

Below are examples of where articles can and cannot be used

| | Indefinite | Definite | Zero |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| <i>Singular countable noun</i> | a wolf | the wolf | ---- |
| <i>Plural countable noun</i> | ---- | the wolves | wolves |
| <i>Uncountable noun</i> | ---- | the water | water |

2. Specific use of the definite article

a) When identity has already been established

e.g. I saw a ghost. *The* ghost...

b) When the noun is modified by another word or expression

e.g. *The* feeling I have is difficult to describe.

c) Unique use (the only one)

e.g. *The* moon, *The* sun

d) Generic use

The tiger is an endangered species

e) Specific objects

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Musical instruments | <i>the</i> guitar |
| Ships | <i>the</i> Titanic |
| Seas, oceans, channels | <i>the</i> Atlantic Ocean, <i>the</i> English Channel |
| Mountain ranges | <i>the</i> Himalayas |
| Groups of islands | <i>the</i> Channel Islands |
| Geographical areas | <i>the</i> north of England |
| Rivers | <i>the</i> Amazon |
| Deserts | <i>the</i> Sahara Desert |
| Hotels | <i>the</i> Hilton |
| Cinemas & theatres | <i>the</i> Apollo Theatre |
| Compound country names | <i>the</i> UK, <i>the</i> USA, <i>the</i> Republic of France |
| Universities as noun phrases | <i>the</i> University of Wales |

Definite articles are generally not used before:

Countries, towns/cities, universities/colleges, streets, squares, languages

3. Specific use of the indefinite article

- a) To introduce a new piece of information
e.g. She saw *a* ghost
- b) To generalise
e.g. *A* cow has horns
- c) One
e.g. Pass me *a* knife please
- d) Quantifying expressions
e.g. *a* hundred, *a* million
- e) Per
e.g. Fifty miles *an* hour, three times *a* day
- f) Exclamations with an adjective
e.g. What *a* beautiful view

4. Specific use of zero articles

- a) Institutions referred to by name (not as a noun phrase)
e.g. Ceredigion College, Aberystwyth University
- b) Meals
e.g. Breakfast, lunch, dinner
- c) Modes of transportation
e.g. Travelling by bicycle protects the environment
- d) Before genitive expressions
e.g. John's coat, my book, your hat

5. Check your own writing

Look through your writing. Underline every article you have used. Have they been used appropriately? Also look for examples of the examples mentioned above. Do you need to add any articles where they are missing?

Further reading:

Huckin, T.N. & Olsen, L.A. (1991). *Technical Writing and Professional Communication for Nonnative Speakers of English* (Second Edition). New York: McGraw Hill.

This worksheet is not based on the above reference source, but in-depth specific advice can be found in:

Chapter 29 (Pp 503-513): Indefinite Articles

Chapter 30 (Pp 514-530): The Definite Article

Acknowledgements:

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