

## ARTICLES

- All singular countable nouns **must have** a determiner in front of them.  
**Determiners:**
  - Indefinite articles
  - Definite articles
  - Demonstratives: this/ that
  - Possessives: my, your, ...
  - Numbers: two, ...
  - Quantifiers: much, many, not much, ...
- We often use no article at all in English. This non-use of the article is so important that we give it a name – **the zero article**.
- **Some** refers to quantity not uncertainty and **cannot be therefore used instead of the indefinite article!** It is only used in front of a plural noun or an uncountable noun – that is everywhere, where **a/an** cannot be used.

**A/an** is used only in front of **a singular countable** (a hat) because it comes from the Old English 'one.'

**The** can be used in front of **a singular countable** (the hat),  
**a plural countable** (the hats)  
**an uncountable** (the water)

**Zero** – we often use no articles in front of **a plural countable** (hats)  
**an uncountable** (water)

### THE INDEFINITE ARTICLE A/AN:

- Is used to classify things (saying things belong to a class of items – a flower) by means of general statement, definition or description.

*Andrew Bright is an architect.*

*An architect is a person who designs buildings.*

*You are an angel.*

- The most common use of a/an is in the sense 'only one but I do not care which one', when we are not specifying any particular person or thing.

*I would like an apple.*

- Is also used when something is mentioned for the first time.

*I looked up and saw a plane. (You don't know which one.)*

NOTE: We always use a/an in **a kind of/sort of/ type of** and in exclamations:  
**What a surprise!**

### THE DEFINITE ARTICLE THE:

- When using *the*, we must always bear a very important fact in mind: it normally has a **definite reference** (i.e. the person or thing referred to is assumed to be known to the speaker or reader).
- The group as a whole – usually nationalities: *The British, the Japanese, the Europeans, the Liberals*

- Specified groups: *the public, the unions, the bosses, ...*

- **Specifying:** by means of back-reference:

*Singleton is a **small village** near Chichester. **The village** is very quiet.*

By means of *the + noun + of*:

***The life of** Napoleon was very stormy.*

By means of clauses and phrases:

***The Smith** you are looking for no longer lives here.*

***The letters** on the shelf are for you.*

Within a limited context (when the listener/ reader can identify easily enough what/ who is being referred to):

*It's **the postman**.*

*She's gone to **the butcher's**.*

*Pass me **the salt**, please.*

- We always use the definite article with **superlatives** (*the best*), with **musical instruments** (*Tom plays the piano.*) and with some **fixed expressions** (*the sooner the better, do the shopping.*)
- And we also use it with '**unique items**', i.e. where there is only one of the kind: *the French Revolution, the United Nations, The Titanic, the Queen, the Government, The Times, the human race, the dinosaurs, the weather.*

### **THE ZERO ARTICLE:**

- We use the zero article before three types of nouns:

**Plural countable nouns:** *Some people want **chips** with everything.*

**Uncountable nouns:** ***Butter** makes you fat.*

**Proper nouns:** ***John** lives in **London**.*

- Zero article is often used in **general statements:**

***Beans** contain a lot of fibre.*

***Watches** have become very accurate.*

***Smoking** is bad for health.*

***Business** has been improving steadily this year.*

- It is always used with **names of people, titles ..., days, months, seasons** and **holidays** (*Monday, June, Christmas,...*), **academic subjects** (*English, History*), **meals** (*breakfast, lunch*), **transport** (*bus, bike*) etc. In almost all these cases a definite article may be used in a certain situation but then, it the meaning is changed (***The breakfast** I ordered still hasn't arrived.*)

For further details please consult ***Longman English Grammar*** (L.G.Alexander, 1996.)