

Definite and Indefinite Articles and the Zero Article.

'the' is called the definite article.

'a' and 'an' are called indefinite articles.

When no article (a/an/the) is used, this is called the 'zero article'.

• Common rules:

'the' can be used before any singular or plural noun. It is used:

...when we are thinking of one particular thing.

The airport runway is nearly finished.

...when it is clear in a situation which thing or things we are talking about.

What's wrong? The engine won't start. (You know and I know I am referring to the engine of the car we are in.)

...when there is only one of something.

The sun is a giant star.



'a' is used before a consonant sound.

a bus



'an' is used before a vowel sound.

an airplane

'a' or 'an' are used before a singular countable noun which isn't clearly defined. (It is unclear which noun we are talking about or it doesn't matter.)

I would like to buy a car.

No article (zero article) is used before plural and uncountable nouns when talking about things in general.

Cars may become less popular in the future as gas prices increase.

• Other Rules for Articles

There are a lot of rules for articles.

As you continue to study English, you will increase your knowledge of them.

Here are some other rules:

Definite Articles.

• with country names that have Republic, States in them etc: *the Republic of Ireland,*

• when the name includes "of" or "Kingdom": *the University of Canberra*

• with rivers, oceans, lakes and seas: *the Murray River, the Tasman Sea,*

• with movies, theater: *I love going to the movies.*

• with the word, radio: *Listening to the radio is something I do every day.*

• with restaurants, hotels, cafes, theaters, art galleries, museums:

the Savoy, the National Gallery, the Berkeley Cinema, the Blue Bar,

but: some places are named after their founders, ending in 's or -s. and do **not** take 'the':

I'm going to Joe's Diner for lunch. I'll see you at McDonald's.

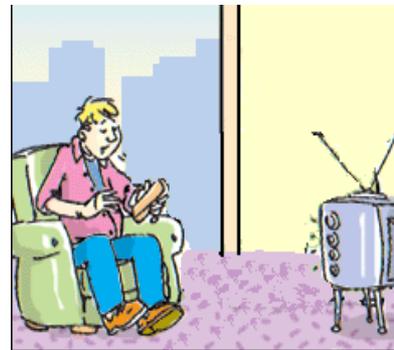


Indefinite Articles.

- suggests the idea of one: *a million, a thousand, a hundred dollars*
- with measurements: *a pound of butter, a kilogram of meat*
- expressing rates, speeds, salaries and prices: *one per cent a month, seven hours a day, fifty dollars an hour, fifty thousand dollars a year, one hundred and twenty miles an hour*
- with some words beginning with a silent 'h': *an hour, an hotel (old-fashioned English)*
- with some ailments: *a cold, a backache, a sore throat, a headache*
- with abstract uncountable nouns preceded by an adjective: *a violent hatred, a sudden love.*

Zero Articles.

- with the word, television: *I watch television every morning.*
but: *The TV is broken. / I am going to buy a television.* (This means the television set.)
- with meals: *I had toast for breakfast. Would you like to have lunch?*
but: if we describe the meal by putting an adjective in front of it, we use *a*: *a delicious dinner*
- with some forms of transport: *by bike, by car, by train, on foot*
- with church, prison hospital, university, school:
Sorry, you can't talk to Annie. She's at school. (She is a student.)
Her mother is in hospital. (i.e. she is a patient)
He will be in prison for five years. (We are thinking of prisons in general, not identifying one particular prison.)
Rose is a student and she loves school.
but: *Today her mother has gone to the school to meet the principal.* (Her mother has gone to the school = we are talking about a specific school, Rose's school.)
- work, home, bed: *I don't like going to work. I go to bed at 9pm.*
but: *I have a very comfortable bed.* (This means bed as a piece of furniture.)
- with continents and countries: *Australia, South Africa, India*
- with states, cities and towns: *Ohio, New York, Dublin, Shanghai, Rochester*
- with islands: *Malta, Jamaica,*
- with mountains: *Mt. Fuji, Everest, Kilimanjaro*
- with names: *Uncle Michael, Mr Darcy, President Bush, Ms. Winter, Dr. Smith*
but: *The doctor phoned.* (This means 'the doctor that I normally go to', so it is a particular person.)
The Prime Minister shook my hand.
- with roads, streets, squares and parks: *Market Road, Oxford Street, Cornwall Park, Hyde Park, Trafalgar Square,*
- with some illnesses: *pneumonia, lung cancer*
- with companies: *Hyundai, Apple, IBM*



Exercise 1

Fill the gaps in the sentences below with **a, an, the** or **nothing** (leave blank).

I went on a cruise visiting a. Fiji, b. Kingdom of Tonga, c. New Zealand and d. Australia.

Last year I visited e. New York and went up f. Statue of Liberty. I also walked along g. Fifth Avenue, looking at all h. shops.

I also went to i. Brisbane, in j. state of Queensland k. last year. I went to l. Queensland Art Gallery, had m. swim at n. artificial beach at South Bank, attended o. concert in p. Botanical Gardens and did some shopping in q. Queen Street. I had r. lot of fun!

In s. city where I live, t. mayor is trying to encourage commuters to use u. subway and bus system by giving them v. discounted tickets. I think w. free public transport would be x. even better idea because y. people would then leave their cars at z. home.

Answer Key:

Exercise 1

a. nothing, b. the, c. nothing, d. nothing, e. nothing, f. the, g. nothing, h. the, i. nothing, j. the, k. nothing, l. the, m. a, n. the (There's only one.), o. a, p. the, q. nothing, r. a, s. the, t. the, u. the, v. nothing, w. nothing, x. an, y. nothing, z. nothing.