

Notes from Steven's Articles Workshop on Tuesday, December 8, 2015

No articles	Indefinite, but no definite	Definite, but no Indefinite	Used differently
Thai	Farsi	Arabic	*Bulgarian (follow noun)
Sanskrit		Hebrew	*Macedonian (follow noun)
Latin		Icelandic	Romance Languages
Japanese			
Chinese			
All Slavic, except*			
Hindi			
Vietnamese			
Tamil			
Korean			
Turkish			
Finnish			
Estonian			
Swahili			
Bantu languages			

Ducks are birds.

A few ducks live here.

Few ducks live here.

The few ducks that live here in winter are mallards.

The ducks were brown.

Three ducks were sick.

A duck was swimming in the pond.

That duck is quacking.

Those ducks are migrating.

Both ducks eat fish.

Some ducks eat worms.

Two ducks came towards us.

The two ducks were flapping as they came.

My ducks escaped.

Another duck flew past.

The other duck was injured.

<http://bogglesworldesl.com/indefinitearticles.htm>

English Uses of Articles

A vs. An

Rule 1:

The article “A” is used before singular, countable nouns which begin with a consonant sound.

Example:

She is **a** doctor.

They saw **a** dog at the park.

He drives **a** car.

Rule 2:

The article “An” is used before singular, countable nouns which begin with a vowel sound.

Example:

He is **an** actor.

They saw **an** eagle in the forest.

She bought **an** envelope.

Remember:

“A” and “an” mean “one” or “a single”. You cannot use “a” or “an” with plural nouns.

Examples:

I saw **a** dogs in the park. *Not Correct*

I saw **a** dog in the park. *Correct*

Rule 3:

When there is an adjective, multiple adjectives, or adverbs-adjective combinations before the noun, “a” or “an” will match the sound of the first adjective or adverb in the list.

Examples:

She is **an** extremely good student.

He drives **a** bright red car.

Rule 4:

Use “a” before words that start with a vowel, but sound like they start with a consonant. Many words that start with “u”, “eu”, or “o” have an initial consonant *sound*.

Example:

She wants to attend **a** university in New York.

Slovakia is **a** European country.

He bought **a** one-way ticket to Hawaii.

Rule 5:

Use “an” before words that start with a consonant, but sound like they start with a vowel. Some words that start with “h” may *sound* like they start with a vowel.

Example:

It was **an** honor to meet you.

We left **an** hour before the party ended.

Also

When using the names of letters, you may use “an” in front of the name of a consonant.

Example:

She studied hard so she would not get **an** F on the test.

Rule 6:

Uncountable nouns will never be preceded by “a” or “an”.

Example:

He had **a** water at lunch. *Not Correct*

He had water at lunch. *Correct*

He had **a** glass of water at lunch. *Correct*

A/An vs. The

Rule 7:

“A” and “an” are called *Indefinite articles*, meaning they are used for unspecific things. They will also be used when “which one” is not important.

Example:

He called for **a** taxi. *(Any taxi will do.)*
Sarah bought **a** dog. *(We know nothing about the dog yet.)*

Rule 8:

Use “a” or “an” when talking about something new, unknown, or introduced for the first time.

Example:

We bought **a** new car. *(Introducing the topic.)*
Do you want to see **a** movie? *(Which one is not known.)*

Rule 9:

“The” is called a *definite article*. It is used to talk about a specific item: one that is known to the people involved in the conversation, something where there is only one, or something that has been previously mentioned.

Example:

He works in **the** same building as you.
The President is on a trip to Europe today.
I bought a new car. It’s **the** blue one right out front.

Also:

Unlike “a” and “an”, “the” can be used with both singular and plural nouns.

Example:

We saw **the** dog at the park.
We saw **the** dogs at the park.

Rule 10:

Using “the” can provide information that makes an item more specific, and therefore known to the listener. This often happens in prepositional phrases.

Example:

Put the book on **the** table with **the** yellow flowers. *As opposed to the table **without** the flowers or the one with **red** flowers.*

Also:

Sometimes the prepositional phrase will just add more information:

I bought the car with a good sound system. *It identifies which car.*

I bought a car with a good sound system. *It provides more information.*

Notice what happens with the first article. When the second one is used as an identifier, we use “the”. When it only provides additional information, we use “a”.

Rule 11:

No article is used with generalities with uncountable nouns or with plural nouns.

Example:

It is much easier to afford gas for your car. (*“Gas” is uncountable.*)

Libraries are found in most cities. (*“Libraries” and “cities” are plural.*)

Rule 12:

Generalities with singular nouns usually take “the”.

Example:

I play **the** saxophone.

The mockingbird is found in the eastern part of the U.S.

Rule 123:

A(AN) can be used like the word "per".

Example:

He got a ticket for driving 90 miles **a** hour.

Bananas are 99 cents **a** pound.

Rule 14:

Comparatives will usually use “a” or “an”.

She decided to buy **a** more expensive watch.

My colleague got **a** bigger raise than I did.

Note:

Sometimes the comparative will take “the”, particularly when followed by the phrase “of the two” (or a similar idea).

Example:

The red car is **the** faster of the two.

When comparing Athens and Rome, I think Athens is **the** more interesting city.

Rule 15:

Use “the” before superlatives and rankings:

Example:

This is **the** best pizza I’ve ever eaten.

John was **the** second person to finish the race.

The last page of that book was so sad.

Rule 16:

Phrases that mean “some” will usually take “a”, particularly if “just” or “only” is in the sentence.

Example:

I only have **a** few minutes until my meeting.

They had **a** lot of money left over after buying dinner.

She lost **a** little weight just by always taking the stairs.

Exception:

No article is used if “few” or “little” mean “a small amount”.

Example:

Few of the people knew where they were going.

She had little money to spend on frivolous purchases.

Rule 17:

Generally, no article is used for illnesses or diseases.

Example:

My grandfather died of cancer.

She caught malaria while exploring the rainforest.

Exceptions:

A cold

A heart attack

A stroke

A sore throat

The flu

The measles

The mumps

The plague

Rule 18:

Directions do not take an article.

Example:

Turn right onto Elm Street.

The courthouse is south of the bank.

UNLESS:

The direction is in a prepositional phrase, and then it takes “the”.

The grocery store is on **the** right.

AND:

If the direction defines a geographical or cultural region.

Virginia is located in **the** South.

The Northeast has very cold winters.

Rule 19:

“The” is used with plural family names when talking about them as a group.

Example:

The Jacksons live next door to me.

We visited **the** Osowskis on our trip to Poland.

Rule 20:

Use “the” with certain adjectives to refer to a group of people.

Example:

The Iroquois tribes were located throughout the Northeast.
He volunteers his time to help **the** poor.

Rule 21:

To prevent confusion between nationalities and languages, nationalities tend to take “the” and the corresponding language does not.

The Slovaks are a friendly people.
Slovak is a very difficult language to learn.

Note:

This rule is not 100%. “Americans”, “Mexicans”, “Germans” and others do not usually require “the”.

Rule 22:

Single-word country names do not take an article. Multi-word country names almost always take “The”, UNLESS the first word is a direction or “New”.

Example:

I lived in Slovakia.
I lived in **The** Slovak Republic.
East Germany and West Germany reunified at the end of the Cold War.

Exceptions when “the” is used:

The Netherlands

Island chains:

The Bahamas

The Maldives

Historically (but becoming less common),

The Sudan

The Congo

Exceptions when “the” is not used:

Equatorial Guinea

Burkina Faso

And others

Rule 23:

Use “the” with the names of:

- oceans
- seas
- coasts
- rivers
- swamps
- archipelagos
- collections of lakes (such as the Great Lakes)
- mountain chains
- deserts
- references on the globe (such as the Equator, the North Pole)
- geographic regions (such as the Northwest, the Middle East)
- bridges (except Tower Bridge)
- hotels
- theaters & museums
- institutes
- skyscrapers
- the Sun, the Moon
- extraordinary works of art or architecture (such as the Mona Lisa, the Colosseum, the Great Wall of China, and the Taj Mahal)

Rule 24:

Do not use an article with:

- individual lakes
- individual islands
- beaches
- waterfalls
- individual mountains (except the Matterhorn)
- canyons (except the Grand Canyon)
- people's first names
- streets (except the High Street)
- public squares
- hospitals
- stadiums
- malls
- parks
- churches & temples
- universities
- colleges
- languages
- religions
- days & months
- holidays

HOWEVER: There are additional exceptions to some of the above categories. For example, “the” is often used in the pattern “the ... of ...”.

Examples:

The University **of** Colorado

The Temple **of** Ranakpur

The Cathedral **of** Siena

USE 25

Time expressions can be especially confusing. “The” is used in some time expressions such as:

- in the morning
- in the afternoon
- in the evening
- during the night
- during the day
- the day before yesterday
- the day after tomorrow
- the fall
- the summer

HOWEVER: In other time expressions, no article is used:

- at night
- at noon
- at midnight
- all day
- all night
- all month
- every month
- every year
- last night
- last Friday
- yesterday
- tomorrow

Also: There are some expressions which can take both “a”, “an”, and “the” such as:

- a/the whole day
- a/the whole month
- an/the entire year
- an/the entire decade