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Articles

An article is a word which comes before a noun. It is used to modify the Noun. The noun can be a person, place, thing or an idea. The article is basically an adjective, but adjectives modify nouns through some description but articles are used instead to point out or refer to nouns. Articles will tell the reader whether we are referring to a general or specific thing.

Now understand the below examples:

- I ate **an apple** yesterday. **The** apple was juicy and delicious. (In the first sentence, the apple is being introduced. In the second sentence speaker and listener both know about that apple.)
- I have found a solution to the problem. (The solution is not yet known to the listener. The problem is known to the speaker and the listener)
- **A teacher** needs patience. (General, Here we are talking about any teacher in random)
- I would like to talk to **the headteacher**. (Specific, Here we are talking about a particular person who is a teacher)
- You must consult **the doctor**. (Which doctor? It could be your family doctor.)
- You must consult **a doctor**. (Which doctor? It could be any doctor. Here the speaker does not have a particular doctor in mind.)

Types of Articles

Articles are classified into two types, which are :

1. Definite Articles
2. Indefinite Articles

1. Definite Articles:

The word "The" is called as a Definite article. "The" refers directly to a specific noun or groups of nouns. It means the Definite article is used to refer to a noun(Person/Thing etc), that has already been mentioned. "The" is used in a sentence when we are talking about a person or thing that is known to both the writer and the reader.

Examples :

- Thank you for **the** advice you gave me.
- **The** dog is very friendly

The definite article (the) can be used before singular countable nouns, plural countable nouns and uncountable nouns. We use "The" in the following conditions :

- Use the to refer to something which has already been mentioned :

Example: On Monday, an unarmed man stole \$1,000 from the bank. **The thief** hasn't been caught yet.

- Use 'the' to refer to people or objects that are unique.

Example: **The sun** rose at 6:17 this morning.

- Use 'the' before superlatives and ordinal numbers.

Example: This is **the highest building** in New York.

- Use 'the' with adjectives, to refer to a whole group of people.

Example: She has given a lot of money to **the poor**.

- Use 'the' with decades.

Example: He was born in **the seventies**.

- Use '*the*' with clauses introduced by *only*

Example: **The only tea** I like is black tea.

- Use 'the' with names of geographical areas, rivers, mountain ranges, groups of islands, canals, and oceans. Use the with the names of famous buildings, works of art, museums, or monuments.

Example: Our ship crossed **the Atlantic** in 7 days.

I would like to visit **the Eiffel Tower**.

- Use 'the' with countries that have plural names. Use the with countries that include the words "republic", "kingdom", or "states" in their names.

Example :

- Do you know anyone who lives in **the Philippines**
- She is visiting **the United States**.

2. Indefinite Article :

There are two indefinite articles in the English Language, which are 'A' and 'An'. We differentiate between 'A' and 'An' on the basis of sound and not on the basis of spelling.

- An is used before the words which begin with a vowel sound. For example, an apple, an egg, an orange, an umbrella, an hour (H is mute when we pronounce hour), an heir etc.
- A is used before words which begin with the consonant sound. For example, a boy, a tree, a ball, a flower, a horse, a hole, a European and a university.

The indefinite articles 'A' and 'An' are used in the following cases :

- When you introduce a person or thing for the first time.
- When you don't expect the reader/listener to understand who or what you are talking about.

Examples :

- If you are really hungry, you can eat an apple.
- We are looking for **an** apartment.

When not to use 'Articles'

1. Before uncountable nouns

We do not use articles before uncountable and abstract nouns used in a general sense.

- **Honey** is sweet. (NOT The honey is sweet.)
- **Sugar** is bad for your teeth.
- **Wisdom** is better than riches.
- **Virtue** is its own reward.

Note: Uncountable nouns take the article **the** when used in a particular sense.

- Would you pass **the sugar?** (= the sugar on the table)

We cannot use the indefinite article or numbers with uncountable nouns.

- Water (NOT a water) (NOT two waters)

2. Before plural countable nouns

We do not use articles before plural countable nouns used in a general sense.

- **Children** usually rush about.
- **Computers** are useful machines.

Note: Plural nouns take the article '**the**' when they are used in a particular sense.

- Where are the children? (Which children? Our children)

3. Before proper nouns

We do not use articles before the names of countries, people, continents, cities, rivers and lakes.

- India is a democratic country. (NOT The India ...)
- Paris is the capital of France. (NOT The Paris ...)

4. Before the names of meals

We do not use articles before the names of meals.

- Mother is cooking **lunch**.
- **Dinner** is ready.

We use **a** when there is an adjective before breakfast, lunch, dinner etc. We use '**the**' when we are talking about a particular meal.

- I had **a late dinner** yesterday.
- **The lunch** we had at the restaurant was very good.

5. Before languages

We do not use articles before the names of languages.

- Can you speak **English?** (NOT Can you speak the English?)
- They speak **French** at home.

6. Before school, college, university, church, bed, hospital, prison etc.

- We learned English at **school**.
- He is at **university**.

The is used before these words when the reference is to the building or object rather than to the normal activity that goes on there.

- I met her at **the church**. (Here the reference is to the building and not to the activity that is going on there.)
- I went to **the hospital** to see my friend.

7. Before Profession -

Do not use 'The' before any profession.

- Engineering is a well-paid career.

8. Before years :

Do not use *the* with years

Example: 1948 was a wonderful year.

Common Mistakes in the use of Articles :

Below we have mentioned some important rules regarding the correct usage of the articles. Understand them properly :

When you talk about a person or thing for the first time, use the indefinite articles (a and an) with them.

- Incorrect: I saw the girl.
- Correct: I saw **a girl**.

Use **the** in subsequent references to that person or thing.

- **Incorrect: A girl** was very beautiful.
- **Correct:** The girl was very beautiful.

Use the indefinite article to talk about a person or thing not known to the speaker or the listener.

- She is going out with **a French guy**. (NOT She is going out with the French guy.)

We can use **'the'** in subsequent references to that person or thing.

- **The French guy** she is going out with is an architect. (NOT A French guy she is going out with is an architect.)

Plural countable nouns can be used without articles, especially when we are talking about things in general.

- Spiders have eight legs.

- Computers are useful machines.
- Apples are red.

A singular uncountable noun is used without an article.

- Milk is nutritious. (NOT The milk is nutritious.)
- Gold is precious. (NOT The gold is precious.)

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