

The Use of Definite and Indefinite Articles

A/AN

Use **a** before nouns with consonant sounds:

b,c,d,f,g,h,j,k,l,m,n,p,q,r,s,t,v,w,x,y,z.

Examples: a cat, a parrot.

Exception: hour which is pronounced "our" because the "h" is silent.

Use **an** before nouns with vowels/vowel sounds **a,e,i,o,u.**

Examples: An owl, an incident, an engineer, an hour.

Exception: Some words which begin with a vowel do not have a vowel sound.

Examples: university, where the "u" is pronounced "y".

"The"

We use the definite article in front of a **noun** when we believe the **listener/reader knows** exactly what we are referring to:

because there is only one:

The Pope is visiting Ireland.

The moon is very bright tonight.

Who is **the president of Brazil**?

We use the definite article **with a superlative adjective** because there is only one who is the best/tallest/most beautiful:

He is **the tallest boy** in the class.

It is **the oldest building** in the town.

We live in a small house next to **the church**. (= the church in our village)

Dad, can I borrow **the car**? (= the car that belongs to our family)

When we stayed at my grandmother's house, we went to **the beach** every day. (= the beach near my grandmother's house)

Look at **the boy** over there. (= the boy I am pointing at)

because we have already mentioned it:

A young man got a nasty shock when he tried to rob a jewellery shop in Richmond. **The man** used a heavy hammer to smash the windows in **the shop**.

We also use the definite article with a singular noun acting for more than one thing:

The wolf is not really a dangerous animal. (= Wolves are not really dangerous animals.)

The kangaroo is found only in Australia. (= Kangaroos are found only in Australia.)

The heart pumps blood around the body. (= Hearts pump blood around bodies.)

We use the definite article to talk about musical instruments:

Joe plays **the piano** really well.

She is learning **the guitar**.

to refer to a **system** or **service**:

How long does it take on **the train**?

I heard it on **the radio**.

You should tell **the police**.

Uncountable nouns never take the indefinite article a/an but they do take singular verbs:

Example: Help is available at the information desk.

List of Uncountable Nouns:

advice	meat	fruit	mathematics
help	rice	wildlife	economics
information	bread	equipment	physics
knowledge	cake	machinery	civics
trouble	coffee	furniture	ethics
work	ice- cream	mail	mumps
enjoyment	water	luggage	measles
fun	oil	jewellery	news
recreation	grass	clothing	tennis
relaxation	hair	money	(other games/sports)

Articles with Geographical Names

We use no article with:

Lakes: We visited Lake Geneva.

Mountains: I saw Mount Fuji from the airplane.

Continents: She loves living in Asia.

Most countries: She travelled to Chile last year but - (The USA / the United States, the Netherlands, the Philippines, the United Kingdom / the UK.)

Counties, states, provinces, regions: They live in Connacht.

Cities, towns, villages: He stayed in Cork for a week last year.

Islands: Bali is popular with Australian tourists.

We use 'the' with:

Rivers: The River Nile flows through Egypt.

Mountain ranges: We ski in the Alps every year.

Deserts: She travelled across the Sahara.

Oceans and seas: We sailed around the Mediterranean.

Groups of Islands: They went to the Canary Islands.