

Articles in English

1. What are Articles?

Articles help the reader or listener understand which person or thing we are talking about.

There are three articles in English:

Type	Article	Meaning
Definite	the	something specific or known
Indefinite	a / an	something general, not known yet
Zero article	Ø (no article)	we use no article in certain cases

PART A — Indefinite Articles: a / an

We use **a/an** when:

- The listener does not know exactly which thing we mean.
- We mention something for the first time.
- We talk about one example of a group.

I bought **a** book.

She is **an** engineer.

Use	Example
a before consonant sounds	a dog, a house, a university (sounds like <i>you</i>)
an before vowel sounds	an apple, an hour (the <i>h</i> is silent), an orange

Note: **It depends on the sound, not the letter.**

a European city

a university

an hour

an honest person (the *h* is silent)

an umbrella

PART B — The Zero Article (no article Ø)

Sometimes we use **no article**. This usually happens with:

1. General ideas (plural or uncountable)

- Teachers work hard.
- Water is essential for life.

2. Most names (proper nouns)

- James lives in Manchester.
- I visited Italy last year.

3. Meals, languages, subjects, sports

- We had breakfast at 8.
- She speaks Arabic.
- He studies chemistry.
- They play football.

PART C — The Definite Article: the

1. The core meaning of ‘the’

We use **the** when:

The speaker and listener both know which person or thing is meant.

This can happen for several reasons:

Situation	Example
We already mentioned it	I saw a dog. The dog was barking.
It is clear from context	Close the window (we both know which window).
There is only one	The sun, the moon, the Prime Minister
It is defined by a phrase or clause	The man who lives next door

2. When we use the:

2.1. Second mention (known information)

First mention = **a/an**

Second mention = **the**

I bought a laptop.

The laptop is very fast.

Reason: Now we know which laptop.

2.2. Shared knowledge (obvious in the situation)

- Can you pass the salt?
- She is waiting at the bus stop.

We assume the listener knows which one.

2.3. Unique things (only one exists)

- the Earth, the sky, the atmosphere
- the government, the internet

2.4. Superlatives and ordinals

- the best student
- the first prize
- the most interesting book

2.5. Specific groups (adjectives used as nouns)

- the poor, the elderly, the unemployed

These words refer to all members of that group.

2.6. Musical instruments and inventions

- She plays the piano.
- He invented the telephone.

2.7. With “of” phrases

- the end of the road
- the top of the mountain
- the history of the UK

2.8. Relative clauses (extra information identifying which one)

- the teacher **who helped me**
- the book **that you recommended**

The clause tells us **which teacher/book**.

3. The (with places and geography)

3.1. Use the with:

Category	Examples
Rivers	the Thames, the Nile
Seas & Oceans	the Mediterranean, the Atlantic
Deserts	the Sahara
Mountain ranges	the Alps, the Himalayas
Groups of islands	the Maldives
Countries with <i>republic/kingdom/states</i>	the United Kingdom, the United States
Buildings	the British Museum, the Tower of London
Hotels & cinemas	the Ritz, the Odeon
Newspapers	the Guardian, the Times

3.2. Do not use the with:

Category	Examples
Most countries	Italy, Pakistan, Japan
Cities	London, Cairo, Paris
Streets	Oxford Street
Lakes	Lake Victoria
Mountains (single)	Mount Everest
Parks	Hyde Park (but: the Lake District)

4. Institutions (school, hospital, prison, etc.)

Meaning changes depending on *use as a place vs. institution*:

He is in prison. (as a prisoner — institution)
They are building a prison. (a building — object)
She goes to school every day. (as a pupil)
The parents visited the school. (building)

5. The definite article and confusion

Common mistakes

- *The people like the music.* (general)
- *People like music.*

- *She is the teacher of English.*
- She is **an English teacher**.

- *Close window.*
- Close **the** window.

Remember:

Meaning	Article
General idea	∅ (no article)
One, not known yet	a / an
Specific, known, or unique	the

PRACTICE

Task 1 — Choose the correct article

1. I bought ___ umbrella and ___ umbrella was very cheap.
2. ___ water in this river is polluted.
3. She plays ___ guitar.
4. I went to ___ hospital to visit my uncle.
5. We visited ___ Lake District last summer.
6. He is studying ___ chemistry.
7. ___ sun rises in the east.
8. She lives in ___ United Arab Emirates.

Task 2 — Correct the mistakes

Rewrite the sentences:

1. I like the dogs. (general meaning)
2. The Mount Everest is the highest mountain.
3. She is in the prison for five years.
4. The people who lives next door are friendly.
5. We went to the Paris last year.

Task 3 — Explanation challenge

Explain why we use *the* in each sentence:

1. The teacher gave us homework.
2. Please open the door.
3. The Nile is in Africa.

Remember:

- Use 'a/an' when something is new, general, or unknown.
- Use 'the' when something is specific, shared, unique, or already known.
- Use 'no article' for general ideas, most countries, languages, meals and subjects.

ARTICLES QUIZ

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. I bought ____ new printer yesterday. ____ printer works really well.
 - a. a / a
 - b. a / the
 - c. the / the
 - d. the / a
2. Please close ____ window. It is getting cold.
 - a. a
 - b. an
 - c. the
 - d. Ø
3. She is ____ experienced teacher who works at ____ college in town.
 - a. an / the
 - b. a / a
 - c. an / a
 - d. a / the
4. ____ water in this bottle is not safe to drink.
 - a. A
 - b. An
 - c. The
 - d. Ø
5. He plays ____ piano beautifully.
 - a. a
 - b. an

c. the

d. Ø

6. We visited ____ Lake District last summer.

a. a

b. an

c. the

d. Ø

7. She wants to study ____ engineering at university.

a. a

b. the

c. an

d. Ø

8. They travelled to ____ United States last year.

a. a

b. an

c. the

d. Ø

9. My brother works as ____ electrician.

a. an

b. a

c. the

d. Ø

10. ___ elderly often need extra support in the community.

- a. A
- b. An
- c. The
- d. Ø

11. I have never climbed ___ Mount Everest.

- a. a
- b. an
- c. the
- d. Ø

12. She was taken to ___ hospital after the accident.

- a. a
- b. the
- c. an
- d. Ø

13. ___ Thames flows through London.

- a. A
- b. An
- c. The
- d. Ø

14. He is in ___ prison for five years.

- a. the
- b. a
- c. an
- d. Ø

15. Can you pass me ____ salt, please?

- a. a
- b. an
- c. the
- d. Ø

16. ____ technology is changing rapidly in the modern world.

- a. A
- b. The
- c. An
- d. Ø

17. It was ____ most difficult exam I have ever taken.

- a. a
- b. an
- c. the
- d. Ø

18. We met ____ manager who interviewed us last week.

- a. a
- b. an
- c. the
- d. Ø

19. She is learning ____ Spanish and ____ French at college.

- a. the / the
- b. Ø / Ø
- c. a / a
- d. an / the

20. At ____ end of the meeting, everyone thanked the speaker.

- a. a
- b. an
- c. the
- d. Ø