

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 | Ø (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