

The

For other uses, see [The \(disambiguation\)](#).

For [technical reasons](#), “The #1s” redirects here. For the band, see [The No.1s](#).

The ⁱ/ðə/ is *the* only definite article in English, denoting person(s) or thing(s) already mentioned, under discussion, implied, or otherwise presumed familiar to the listener or reader. 'The' is the [most commonly used word](#) in the English language, accounting for 7 percent of all words.^[1]

'The' can be used with both singular and plural nouns, with nouns of any gender, and with nouns that start with any letter. This is different from many other languages which have different articles for different genders or numbers.

1 Pronunciation

In most dialects, “the” is pronounced as /ðə/ (with the [voiced dental fricative](#) /ð/ followed by a [schwa](#)) when followed by a consonant sound, and as /ði:/ (homophonous with *thee*) when followed by a vowel sound or used as an [emphatic form](#).^[2] In modern [American English](#), however, there is an increasing tendency to limit the usage of the latter pronunciation to emphatic purposes and use the former even before a vowel.^[3]

In some Northern England dialects of English, *the* is pronounced [t̪ə] (with a [dental t](#)) or as a [glottal stop](#), usually written in [eye dialect](#) as ⟨t⟩; in some dialects it reduces to nothing. This is known as [definite article reduction](#). In dialects that do not have the voiced dental fricative /ð/, *the* is pronounced with the [voiced dental plosive](#), as in /d̪ə/ or /d̪i:/.

2 Etymology

The and *that* are common developments from the same Old English system. Old English had a definite article *se* (in the masculine gender), *sēo* (feminine), and *þæt* (neuter). In Middle English, these had all merged into *þe*, the ancestor of the Modern English word *the*.^[4]

3 Usage

The principles of the use of the definite article in English are described under “[Use of articles](#)”. The word *the* as in phrases like “the more the better”, has a distinct origin and etymology and by chance has evolved to be identical to the definite article.^[5] (See the Wiktionary entry *the*.)

3.1 Geographical names

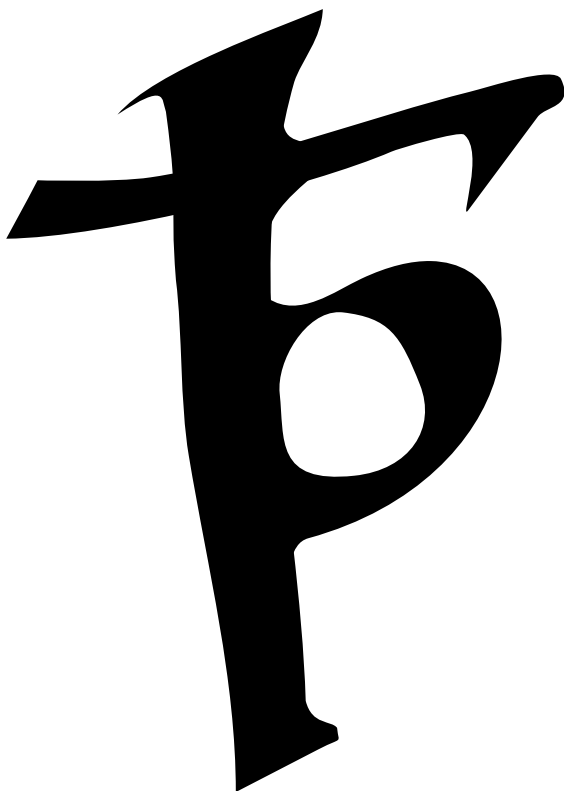
An area in which the use or non-use of *the* is sometimes problematic is with [geographic names](#). Names of rivers, seas, mountain ranges, deserts, island groups ([archipelagoes](#)) and the like are generally used with the definite article (*the Rhine*, *the North Sea*, *the Alps*, *the Sahara*, *the Hebrides*).

Names of continents, individual islands, countries, regions, administrative units, cities and towns mostly do not take the article (*Europe*, *Skye*, *Germany*, *Scandinavia*, *Yorkshire*, *Madrid*). However, there are certain exceptions:

- Countries and territories whose names derive from common nouns such as “kingdom”, “republic” or even “coast” take the article: *the United States*, *the United Kingdom*, *the Soviet Union*, *the Czech Republic*, *the Ivory Coast*.^[6]
- Countries and territories whose names derive from “island” or “land” however only take the definite article if they represent a plural noun: *The Netherlands* do, *the Falkland Islands*, *the Faroe Islands* and *the Cayman Islands* do, even *the Philippines* or *the Comoros* do, though the plural noun “Islands” is omitted there. The (singular) *Greenland* on the other hand doesn't take the definite article, neither does *Christmas Island* or *Norfolk Island*.
- Certain countries and regions whose names derive from mountain ranges, rivers, deserts, etc. are sometimes used with an article even though in the singular (*the Lebanon*, *the Sudan*, *the Yukon*),^[7] but this usage is declining, although *the Gambia* remains the recommended name of that country. Since the independence of Ukraine (formerly sometimes called *the Ukraine*), most style guides have advised dropping the article^[8] (in some other languages there is a [similar issue involving prepositions](#)). Use of *the Argentine* for *Argentina* is now old-fashioned.

- Some names include an article for historical reasons, such as **the Bronx**, or to reproduce the native name (**The Hague**).
- Names beginning with a common noun followed by *of* may take the article, as in *the Isle of Wight* or *the Isle of Portland* (compare *Christmas Island*). The same applies to names of institutions: *Cambridge University*, but *the University of Cambridge*.

4 Abbreviations for “the” and “that”



Barred thorn (after Ælfric)

Since “the” is one of the most frequently used words in English, at various times short abbreviations for it have been found:

- Barred **thorn**: the earliest abbreviation, it is used in manuscripts in the **Old English** language. It is the letter **þ** with a bold horizontal stroke through the ascender, and it represents the word *þæt*, meaning “the” or “that” (neuter **nom.** / **acc.**)
- **þ̅** and **þ̅** (þ with a superscript *e* or *t*) appear in **Middle English** manuscripts for “þe” and “þat” respectively.
- **ȝ** and **ȝ** are developed from *þ* and *þ̅* and appear in Early Modern manuscripts and in print (see **Ye form** below).

Occasional proposals have been made by individuals for an abbreviation. In 1916, Legros & Grant included in their classic printers’ handbook *Typographical Printing-Surfaces*, a proposal for a letter similar to **H** to represent “Th”, thus abbreviating “the” to *he*.^[9] Why they did not propose reintroducing to the English language “*þ*”, for which blocks were already available for use in **Icelandic** texts, or the *ȝ* form is unknown.

4.1 Ye form

See also: **Ye olde**

In Middle English, *the* (þe) was frequently abbreviated as a *þ* with a small *e* above it, similar to the abbreviation for *that*, which was a *þ* with a small *t* above it. During the latter **Middle English** and **Early Modern English** periods, the letter **thorn** (þ) in its common script, or **cursive**, form came to resemble a *y* shape. As a result, the use of a *y* with an *e* above it (**ȝ**) as an abbreviation became common. This can still be seen in reprints of the 1611 edition of the **King James Version of the Bible** in places such as Romans 15:29, or in the **Mayflower Compact**. Historically the article was never pronounced with a *y* sound, even when so written.

5 References

- [1] Norvig, Peter. “English Letter Frequency Counts: Mayzner Revisited”.
- [2] “the – definition”. *Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*.
- [3] Ladefoged, Peter; Johnson, Keith (2010). *A Course in Phonetics* (6th ed.). Boston: Wadsworth. p. 110.
- [4] “The and That Etymologies”. *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved 18 June 2015.
- [5] “the, adv.1.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2016. Web. 11 March 2016.
- [6] Using ‘the’ with the Names of Countries
- [7] Swan, Michael *How English Works*, p. 25
- [8] Ukraine or “the Ukraine”? by Andrew Gregorovich, in-foukes.com
- [9] Missed Opportunity for Ligatures

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6.1 Text

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