

ARTICLE USAGE: GENERIC REFERENCE

The way we use articles with nouns having generic reference varies according to the type of noun.

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More specifically article usage varies depending on whether the noun is:

countable or non-countable

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More specifically article usage varies depending on whether the noun is:

- countable or non-countable
- (if countable) singular or plural

ARTICLE USAGE: GENERIC REFERENCE

count nouns have a natural plural form:

device

devices

mouse

mice

ARTICLE USAGE: GENERIC REFERENCE

count nouns have a natural plural form, non-count nouns do not:

device

devices

mouse

mice

information

computing

ARTICLE USAGE: GENERIC REFERENCE

non count nouns with generic reference → Ø
article

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non count nouns with generic reference → Ø
article

Computing has changed our world

ARTICLE USAGE: GENERIC REFERENCE

plural count nouns with generic reference → Ø
article

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plural count nouns with generic reference → Ø
article

Computers have changed our world

ARTICLE USAGE: GENERIC REFERENCE

singular count nouns with generic reference →
some kind of article

ARTICLE USAGE: GENERIC REFERENCE

singular count nouns with generic reference →
some kind of article

The computer has changed our world

ARTICLE USAGE: GENERIC REFERENCE

There is a clear contrast between non-count nouns and plural nouns, on the one hand, and count singular nouns, on the other:

- Ø Computing has changed our world
- Ø Computers have changed our world

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The computer has changed our world

ARTICLE USAGE: GENERIC REFERENCE

When a noun is modified (e.g. by an adjective) and the modifier is placed BEFORE the noun we still have a context of generic reference:

Ø Digital computers have changed our world

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When a noun is modified (e.g. by an adjective) and the modifier is placed BEFORE the noun we still have a context of generic reference:

- Ø Digital computers have changed our world
- Ø Conventional serial von-Neumann computers have changed our world

ARTICLE USAGE: GENERIC REFERENCE

However when a noun is modified by elements placed AFTER the noun, there **tends** to be a context of specific reference:

(The) conventional serial computers **based on the von-Neumann architecture** have changed our world

ARTICLE USAGE: GENERIC REFERENCE

PREmodification → generic reference:

∅ von-Neumann computers have changed our world

ARTICLE USAGE: GENERIC REFERENCE

PREmodification → generic reference:

∅ von-Neumann computers have changed our world

POSTmodification → specific reference

(the) computers based on the von-Neumann architecture have changed our world

THE BIG PICTURE

Plural nouns →

∅ article

Non-count nouns →

∅ article

Singular count nouns →

some kind of article

THE BIG PICTURE

- Ø Computing has changed our world
- Ø Computers have changed our world

The computer has changed our world

THE BIG PICTURE

Premodification → generic reference:

∅ von-Neumann computers have changed our world

Postmodification → specific reference

(the) computers based on the von-Neumann architecture have changed our world

EXCEPTIONS

Some adjectives, because of their meaning, imply specific reference:

- The best solutions

- The first solutions

- The only problems

- The next generation

- The last problems

- The same solutions

EXCEPTIONS

Some non count nouns have “special” plural forms:

I like whisky

EXCEPTIONS

Some non count nouns have “special” plural forms:

I like whisky

I'd like two whiskies

EXCEPTIONS

Some non count nouns have “special” plural forms:

I like whisky

I'd like two whiskies (two typical quantities of X)

EXCEPTIONS

Some non count nouns have “special” plural forms:

I like wine

EXCEPTIONS

Some non count nouns have “special” plural forms:

I like wine

I like young wines

EXCEPTIONS

Some non count nouns have “special” plural forms:

I like wine

I like young wines (kinds of wine)

COPULAR “A(N)”

In copular contexts we must use the indefinite pronoun with singular count nouns:

Mi hermano es médico

*My brother is **a** doctor*

COPULAR “A(N)”

In copular contexts we must use the indefinite pronoun with singular count nouns:

Quiere hacerse ingeniero

*He wants to become **an** engineer*

COPULAR “A(N)”

In copular contexts we must use the indefinite pronoun with singular count nouns:

Este se llama "sistema de cabeza móvil"

*This is called **a** "moving head system"*

COPULAR “A(N)”

This contrast is also found after the preposition "as":

Como profesor estoy en contra del proyecto
As a teacher I'm against the plan

ARTICLE USAGE WITH CERTAIN ADJECTIVES

Certain adjectives in Spanish disallow the use of the indefinite article, the corresponding adjectives in English require an indefinite article with singular count nouns:

Debe de haber otra solución

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Debe de haber otra solución

There must be another solution

ARTICLE USAGE WITH CERTAIN ADJECTIVES

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Otro punto importante es el de la seguridad

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Otro punto importante es el de la seguridad

Another important point is that of security

ARTICLE USAGE WITH CERTAIN ADJECTIVES

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tal diseño

*such **a** design*

tal enfoque

*such **an** approach*

hay cierta persona que se opondrá

*here is **a** certain person who will object*

OMISSION OF THE ARTICLE WITH SINGULAR COUNT NOUNS

It is possible to omit the article with singular count nouns with certain prepositional expressions:

La información debe almacenarse en disco

(The) information should be stored on (the) disk

OMISSION OF THE ARTICLE WITH SINGULAR COUNT NOUNS

It is possible to omit the article with singular count nouns with parallel noun phrases

The operating system allows communication between ø user and ø machine

The shareware system has advantages for both ø programmer and ø user

OBLIGATORY OMISSION OF THE ARTICLE

We must omit the article in the following contexts:
when the noun refers to certain human institutions considered in their primary function:

He's in prison (→ he is a prisoner)

He's in the prison (for example, visiting a friend)

He's at university (→ he is a student)

He's at the university (→ giving a talk)

OBLIGATORY OMISSION OF THE ARTICLE

We must omit the article in the following contexts:
with certain time expressions, for example expressions introduced by *next* or *last*, when *next* and *last* are calculated with respect to the moment of speaking.

I'll finish it next week

I saw him last Friday