

Articles

Articles are words that define a noun as specific or unspecific.

Definite Article

The definite article is the word *the*. It limits the meaning of a noun to one particular thing.

For example, your friend might ask, “Are you going to **the** party this weekend?” The definite article tells you that your friend is referring to a specific party that both of you know about. The definite article can be used with singular, plural, or uncountable nouns.

Below are some examples of the definite article *the* used in context:

Please give me the hammer.

Please give me the red hammer; the blue one is too small.

Please give me the nail.

Please give me the large nail; it’s the only one strong enough to hold this painting.

Please give me the hammer and the nail.

The Indefinite Article

The indefinite article takes two forms. It’s the word *a* when it precedes a word that begins with a consonant. It’s the word *an* when it precedes a word that begins with a vowel. The indefinite article indicates that a noun refers to a general idea rather than a particular thing.

For example, you might ask your friend, “Should I bring *a* gift to the party?” Your friend will understand that you are not asking about a specific type of gift or a specific item. “I am going to bring *an* apple pie,” your friend tells you. Again, the indefinite article indicates that she is not talking about a specific apple pie. Your friend probably doesn’t even have any pie yet. The indefinite article only appears with singular nouns.

Consider the following examples of indefinite articles used in context:

Please hand me a book; any book will do.

Please hand me an autobiography; any autobiography will do.

Exceptions: Choosing A or An

There are a few exceptions to the general rule of using *a* before words that start with consonants and *an* before words that begin with vowels.

The first letter of the word *honor*, for example, is a consonant, but it's unpronounced. In spite of its spelling, the word *honor* begins with a vowel sound. Therefore, we use *an*.

Consider the example sentence below for an illustration of this concept.

My mother is a honest woman.

My mother is an honest woman.

Similarly, when the first letter of a word is a vowel but is pronounced with a consonant sound, use *a*, as in the sample sentence below:

She is an United States senator.

She is a United States senator.

This holds true with acronyms and initialisms, too: **an** LCD display, **a** UK-based company, **an** HR department, **a** URL.

Article Before an Adjective

Sometimes an article modifies a noun that is also modified by an adjective. The usual word order is article + adjective + noun. If the article is indefinite, choose *a* or *an* based on the word that immediately follows it.

Consider the following examples for reference:

Eliza will bring a small gift to Sophie's party.

I heard an interesting story yesterday.

Indefinite Articles with Uncountable Nouns

Uncountable nouns are nouns that are either difficult or impossible to count. Uncountable nouns include intangible things (e.g., information, air), liquids (e.g., milk, wine), and things that are too large or numerous to count (e.g., equipment, sand, wood). Because these things can't be counted, you should never use **a** or **an** with them—remember, the indefinite article is only for singular nouns. Uncountable nouns can be modified by words like *some*, however.

Consider the examples below for reference:

Please give me a water.

Water is an uncountable noun and should not be used with the indefinite article.

Please give me some water.

However, if you describe the water in terms of countable units (like bottles), you can use the indefinite article.

Please give me a bottle of water.

Please give me an ice.

Please give me an ice cube.

Please give me some ice .

Note that depending on the context, some nouns can be countable or uncountable (e.g., hair, noise, time):

We need a light in this room.

We need some light in this room.

Using Articles with Pronouns

Possessive pronouns can help identify whether you're talking about specific or nonspecific items. As we've seen, articles also indicate specificity. But if you use both a possessive pronoun and an article at the same time, readers will become confused. Possessive pronouns are words like *his*, *my*, *our*, *its*, *her*, and *their*. Articles should not be used with pronouns.

Consider the examples below.

Why are you reading the my book?

The and *my* should not be used together since they are both meant to modify the same noun. Instead, you should use one or the other, depending on the intended meaning:

Why are you reading the book?

Why are you reading my book?

Omission of Articles

Occasionally, articles are omitted altogether before certain nouns. In these cases, the article is implied but not actually present. This implied article is sometimes called a "zero article." Often, the article is omitted before nouns that refer to abstract ideas.

Look at the following examples:

Let's go out for a dinner tonight.

Let's go out for dinner tonight.

The creativity is a valuable quality in children.

Creativity is a valuable quality in children.

Many languages and nationalities are not preceded by an article. Consider the example below:

I studied the French in high school for four years.

I studied French in high school for four years.

Sports and academic subjects do not require articles. See the sentences below for reference:

I like to play the baseball.

I like to play baseball .

My sister was always good at the math .

My sister was always good at math .

REVISE:

The **number one rule** is this: if a word is countable (e.g. one book, two books), you **must always** use an article (or *my, his*, etc.): *I read a book.*

This is true even if there are adjectives before the noun: *He drives an old car.* ✓

Never use *a* or *an* with a word that is plural (e.g. books, trees) or uncountable (e.g. water, advice): *I asked her for advice.* ✓

Note that we use *a* in front of words that start with a consonant sound (*a horse, a carrot*) and *an* in front of words with a vowel sound (*an apple, an elephant*).

The next most important thing to understand is the difference between *a/an* and *the*. Basically, we use *a/an* when we don't need to say which thing we are talking about. We use *the* to talk about a specific thing:

*I caught **a train** to London.* (it doesn't matter *which* train)

***The train** was late.* (that particular train was late)

We often use *a* when we mention something for the first time, and then change to *the* when it is clear which thing we are talking about:

*He was talking to **a man**. **The man** was laughing.*

*She gave him **a present**. **The present** was very expensive.*

We also use *the* when it is obvious which thing we are talking about or when there is only one of something:

*Could you shut **the door**, please?*

*I cleaned **the bathroom** this morning.*

*He travelled around **the world**.*

***The sun** is hot today.*

If you stick to the rules above, you will be correct in almost all cases. However, there are a few exceptions, and the following are the most useful ones to learn:

We don't use *a/an* before the names of meals:

We had lunch at noon.

We don't use *a/an* before words like *school, prison, or college* when we are talking about them in a general way:

I hope to go to college.

He spent three years in prison.

With the word 'hospital', there is a difference between British and American English:

My brother's in hospital (UK) / *in the hospital* (US).

We use *the* before the names of shops or places where we go for services when they are the ones we usually go to:

I need to go to the supermarket.

She went to the doctor's.

Prepositions

Prepositions are words that show relationships. A sentence would not make sense without the use of a preposition. There are different types of prepositions used in the English language that not only add detail but make a sentence complete. Prepositions are used to show location, time, direction, cause and possession.

Simple Prepositions

Simple prepositions are words like **at, for, in, off, on, over, and under**. These common prepositions can be used to describe a location, time or place.

Some examples of [common prepositions](#) used in sentences are:

- He sat *on* the chair.
- There is some milk *in* the fridge.
- She was hiding *under* the table.
- The cat jumped *off* the counter.

Double Prepositions

Double prepositions are two simple prepositions used together, often indicating direction.

Some examples are **into, upon, onto, out of, from within**.

- Once *upon* a time, there was a beautiful princess.
- The baby climbed *onto* the table.
- It is *up to* us to find the answer.
- The loud noise came *from within* the stadium.
- She never leaves *without* her phone.
- The bird sat *atop* the oak tree.
- The caterpillar turned *into* a butterfly.
- I was unable to get *out of* the appointment.

Compound Prepositions

Compound prepositions (or complex prepositions) consist of two or more words, usually a simple preposition and another word, to convey location. Some examples are **in addition to, on behalf of, and in the middle of**.

- She sat *across from* Marie.
- I attended the meeting *on behalf of* my company.
- We were *in the middle of* the storm.
- He has gym class *in addition to* his regular classes today.
- He picked up the penny *from beneath* the couch.
- Aside from* singing, she also plays the piano at the bar.
- My car is parked *in front of* the mailbox.
- The weather will be good this weekend *according to* Tom.

Participle Prepositions

Participle prepositions have endings such as -ed and -ing. Examples are words such as **considering, during, concerning, provided.**

- She is interested in anything *concerning* horses.
- He works one job *during* the day and another at night.
- The dog kept *following* him home.
- All the neighbors were there *including* the new one.
- The principal was asking questions *regarding* her behavior.
- Considering* his age, he did a great job.
- He was *frustrated* at the situation.
- The teacher said no talking *during* class.

Phrase Prepositions

Phrase prepositions (or prepositional phrases) include a preposition, an object, and the object's modifier. Examples include phrases like **on time, at home, before class,** and **on the floor.**

- I will get to the conference *on time*.
- The baseball game was canceled *after the heavy rain*.
- John found his homework *under the bed*.
- The children loved the gifts *from their grandparents*.
- He succeeded *with a little help*.
- We met to discuss the project *before class*.
- She left muddy footprints *on the clean floor*.
- According to his wishes*, his funeral will be private.

Some Preposition Rules:

Prepositional phrases function as Conjunctions: The preposition which is used before a clause functions as a conjunction. But when a word is used before a noun phrase it stays as a preposition.

1. After the lecture, they went to the movie. (Preposition)
2. After they ate, they went to the movie. (Conjunction)
3. He stood before the judge and declared his innocence. (Preposition)
4. Before he declared his innocence, he looked at the judge for a long time. (Conjunction)

Prepositions act as Adverbs: Sometimes, words you might think of as prepositions act like adverb. When a word is modifying a verb, it is starting act like an adverb. These types of prepositions in English which follow this rule i.e. about, across, around, before, beyond, in, inside, near, opposite, outside, past, round, through, under, up, within.

1. Dorothy colors outside the lines.
Here outside the lines is an adverbial phrase and outside is a preposition.
2. If you want to see the eclipse, you will need to go outside.
Here outside tells you where you will need to go and without an object outside is an adverb.

Prepositions with Adjectives: Sometimes preposition words appear after adjectives to complete or elaborate on the ideas or emotions that adjectives describe.

Following are some adjective - preposition examples sentences:

1. Jenny is afraid of swimming in the ocean.
2. The kids are very fond of the ice-cream.
3. She was highly skilled in physics and chemistry.
4. Eating healthy is good for your health.

Use of Preposition with Noun: Some preposition words can be used with nouns to connect or provide clarification for ideas explained in sentences. In this type of combination, the preposition always come after the noun.

Here are some noun - preposition examples:

1. Her answer to the teacher's question was correct.
2. Tony has so much admiration for his father.
3. My friend has a fear of the dark.
4. He has little experience in backpacking.

Preposition Definition with Verbs: To connect with the objects, certain verbs need prepositions. Verbs are usually followed by the prepositions before the object of the verb. These types of prepositions are known as the dependent prepositions. Following are some preposition examples list with verb:

1. I applied for the job, but I didn't get it.
2. Has he recovered from his illness yet?
3. He believes in ghosts.
4. This shampoo smells of blossoms.

Preposition of Direction	Prepositions Meaning
Above	Higher relative to something else
Across	On the other side of
Along	Beside
Among	Within a group
Around	In a circular way
At	Indicates a particular point
Behind	At the back of
Below	Lower relative to something else
Beside	Next to
Close to	Near
Over	Above
Through	From one point to the next
Toward	In the direction of
Up	From low to high
Down	From high to low
Between	In the space separating two things
By	Near
Inside/In	Within
Near	Close by
Next to	Beside
On	Touching something
Onto	Moving on top of something
Off	Away from
Past	On the father side of
Under	Below something

Preposition of Time	Preposition Meaning
On	Days (of the week) & dates
In	Months/seasons/year, part of the day, after a period
At	A specific point of time, exceptions
Since	From a specific point in time until now (past till now)
For	Over a certain period of time
Ago	From now to a specific point in the past (now till past)
During	Throughout the course
Before	Previous to in time, earlier than
After	Subsequent in time, at a later time than
Until (Till)	Up to a certain point in time
To/ past	Telling the time
From/ To	A starting point/ an end point
By	Not later than

Preposition of Place	Prepositions Meaning
In	Position or state inside
At	In the area of, specific position, an event (or a place related to it)
On	Position above, in contact with, for a certain side, the state or process of & means of conveyance
Off	From a place or position
By, Beside	At the side of, close to & next to
Under	In a lower position, beneath the surface
Over	In or at a position above, more than
Below	In or to a lower place, beneath
Above	Overhead
Up	From a lower towards a higher point
Down	A descending direction

English Grammar Prepositions	Preposition Meaning
Or	Originating from, composed of, associated with, belonging to
By	In the name of; through the agency or action of
About	Estimation of quantity, on the subject of
For	Indicates the object, aim or purpose
With	In the presence or use of