

University of Asia Pacific
IISS 101: Module 2# Articles

Definition: The words 'a' or 'an' and 'the' are called Articles. They come before nouns. 'A' or 'an' is called the Indefinite Article, because it usually leaves indefinite the person or thing spoken of:

e.g. **A doctor; that is, any doctor.**

'The' is called the Definite Article, because it normally points out some particular person or thing:
e.g. **He saw the doctor; meaning some particular doctor.**

RULES:

The Indefinite Article- 'a' or 'an':

1. The indefinite article is used before singular countable nouns, e.g. A book, an orange, a girl
2. The choice between 'a' and 'an' is determined by sound.
 - Before a word beginning with a vowel sound 'an' is used: e.g. An ant, an enemy, an ink-pad, an orange, an umbrella, an hour, an honest man, an heir.
 - Before a word beginning with a consonant sound a is used: e.g. A boy, a reindeer, a woman, a yard, a horse; also a university, a union, a European, a ewe, a unicorn, a useful article (words with a consonant sound of 'u') and a one-eyed man (because one begins with the consonant sound of 'w')
3. An indefinite article is used in its original numerical sense of one; as,
Twelve inches make a foot.
Not a word was said.
A word to the wise is sufficient.
A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
4. In the vague sense of a certain likelihood; as,
A William (= a certain person named William) is suspected by the police.
5. In the sense of any, to single out an individual as the representative of a class; as,
A pupil should obey his teacher.
A cow is a useful animal.
6. To make a common noun of a proper noun; as,
A Daniel comes to judgement! (A Daniel = a very wise man)

The Definite Article- 'the':

1. The definite article is used before singular countable nouns, plural countable nouns and uncountable nouns, e.g., The book, the books, the milk
2. When we talk about a particular person or thing, or one already referred to (that is, when it is clear from the context which one we mean).
The book you want is out of print. (Which book? The one you want.)
Let's go to the park. (= the park in this town)
The girl cried, (the girl = the girl already talked about)
3. When a singular noun is meant to represent a whole class;
The horse is a noble animal.
The cat loves comfort.
The rose is the sweetest of all flowers.
4. Before some proper names, viz., these kinds of place-names:
 - (a) oceans and seas, e.g. the Pacific, the black Sea
 - (b) rivers, e.g. the Jamuna, the Nile
 - (c) canals, e.g. the Suez Canal
 - (d) deserts, e.g. the Sahara
 - (e) groups of islands, e.g. the West Indies
 - (f) mountain-ranges, e.g. the Himalayas, the Alps

(g) a very few names of countries, which include words like republic and kingdom (e.g. the Irish Republic, the United Kingdom) also: the Ukraine, the Netherlands (and its seat of government the Hague)

5. Before the names of certain books:

The Holy Quran, the Bible, the Iliad, The Mahabharat etc.

6. Before names of things unique of their kind; as,

The sun, the sky, the ocean, the sea, the earth.

7. Before a Proper noun when it is qualified by an adjective or a defining adjectival clause; as,

The great Akbar, the immortal Shakespeare.

The Mr. Rahman whom you met last night is my uncle.

8. With Superlatives; as,

The darkest cloud has a silver lining.

This is the best book of elementary chemistry.

9. Before musical instruments; as,

He can play the flute.

10. Before an adjective when the noun is understood; as,

The poor are always with us.

11. Before a noun (with emphasis) to give the force of a Superlative; as,

The Verb is the word (= the chief word) in a sentence.

12. As an Adverb with Comparatives; as,

The more the merrier.

(= by how much more, by so much the merrier)

The more they get, the more they want.

Omission of the Article:

1. The Article is omitted before names of substances and abstract nouns (i.e. uncountable nouns) used in a general sense.

Sugar is bad for your teeth.

Gold is a precious metal.

Wisdom is the gift of heaven.

Honesty is the best policy.

[Note:- Uncountable nouns take the when used in a particular sense; as,

Would you pass me the sugar? (= the sugar on the table)

I can't forget the kindness with which he treated me.]

2. Before plural countable nouns used in a general sense; as,

Children like chocolates.

Computers are used in many offices.

[Note that such nouns take the when used with a particular meaning; as,

Where are the children? (= our children)]

3. Before most proper nouns (except those referred to earlier), namely, names of people (e.g. Gopal, Rahim), names of continents, countries, cities, etc. (e.g. Europe, Pakistan, Nagpur), names of individual mountains (e.g. Mount Everest), individual islands, lakes, hills, etc.

4. Before names of meals (used in a general sense); as,

What time do you have lunch?

Dinner is ready.

[Note: We use a when there is an adjective before breakfast, lunch, dinner, etc. We use the when we specify.

I had a late lunch today.

The dinner we had at the Tourist Hotel was very nice

5. Before languages; as,

We are studying English.

6. Before school, college, university, church, bed, hospital, prison, when these places are visited or used for their primary purpose; as,

I learnt French at school.

He stays in bed till 9.00 every morning.

My uncle is still in hospital.

[Note: The is used with these words when we refer to them as a definite place, building or object rather than to the normal activity that goes on there; as,

The school is very near my home.

I met him at the church.

The bed is broken.

7. Before names of relations, like father, mother, aunt, uncle, and also cook and nurse, meaning 'our cook', 'our nurse', as,

Father has returned.

Aunt wants you to see her.

Cook has given notice.

8. Before predicative nouns denoting a unique position, i.e., a position that is normally held at one time by one person only; as,

He was elected chairman of the Board.

Mr. Mossain became Principal of the College in 2015.

Repetition of the article:

1. If I say-

I have a black and white dog.

I mean a dog that is partly black and partly white.

But if I say-

I have a black and a white dog,

I mean two dogs, one black and the other white.

Hence when two or more adjectives qualify the same noun, the Article is used before the first adjective only; but when they qualify different nouns, expressed or understood, the Article is normally used before each adjective.

2. We may either say-

The third and the fourth chapter.

[Or] The third and fourth chapters.

3. In expressing a comparison, if two nouns refer to the same person or thing, the Article is used before the first noun only; as,

He is a better mechanic than clerk.

He is a better poet than novelist.

But if they refer to different persons or things, the Article must be used with each noun; as,

He would make a better statesman than a philosopher (would make).