

A

Study this example:

I had **a sandwich** and **an apple** for lunch.

**The sandwich** wasn't very good, but **the apple** was nice.



JOE

KAREN

Joe says '**a** sandwich', '**an** apple' because this is the first time he talks about them.

Joe now says '**the** sandwich', '**the** apple' because Karen knows which sandwich and which apple he means – **the** sandwich and **the** apple that he had for lunch.

Compare **a** and **the** in these examples:

- ☐ **A man** and **a woman** were sitting opposite me. **The man** was American, but I think **the woman** was British.
- ☐ When we were on holiday, we stayed at **a hotel**. Sometimes we ate at **the hotel** and sometimes we went to **a restaurant**.

B

We use **the** when we are thinking of a specific thing. Compare **a/an** and **the**:

- ☐ Tim sat down on **a chair**. (perhaps one of many chairs in the room)  
Tim sat down on **the chair nearest the door**. (a specific chair)
- ☐ Paula is looking for **a job**. (not a specific job)  
Did Paula get **the job she applied for**? (a specific job)
- ☐ Do you have **a car**? (not a specific car)  
I cleaned **the car** yesterday. (= my car)

C

We use **the** when it is clear in the situation which thing or person we mean. For example, in a room we talk about **the light** / **the floor** / **the ceiling** / **the door** / **the carpet** etc. :

- ☐ Can you turn off **the light**, please? (= the light in this room)
- ☐ I took a taxi to **the station**. (= the station in that town)
- ☐ (*in a shop*) I'd like to speak to **the manager**, please. (= the manager of this shop)

In the same way, we say (go to) **the bank** / **the post office**:

- ☐ I have to go to **the bank** and then I'm going to **the post office**.  
(The speaker is usually thinking of a specific bank or post office.)

We also say (go to) **the doctor** / **the dentist**:

- ☐ Clare isn't very well. She's gone to **the doctor**. (= her usual doctor)
- ☐ I don't like going to **the dentist**.

Compare **the** and **a**:

- ☐ I have to go to **the bank** today.  
Is there **a bank** near here?
- ☐ I don't like going to **the dentist**.  
My sister is **a dentist**.

D

We say 'once **a week** / three times **a day** / £1.50 **a kilo**' etc. :

- ☐ 'How often do you go to the cinema?' 'About once **a month**.'
- ☐ 'How much are those potatoes?' '£1.50 **a kilo**.'
- ☐ Helen works eight hours **a day**, six days **a week**.