

Grammar Reference

Articles

A and an

A or **an** means one person or thing. We use **a** or **an**:

1) before singular nouns: *I've been to **a** concert. We had **a** great day and we saw **an** elephant.*

2) before the name of a job:

*My sister wants to be **an** engineer.*

A or an?

Use **a** before consonant sounds: **a** chair, **a** horse, **a** laptop

This includes letters **u** or **eu** when they are pronounced **y** (/j/): **a** university, **a** euro

Use **an** before vowel sounds. These words usually start with **a**, **e**, **i**, **o**, **u**: **an** architect, **an** idea, **an** umbrella

Also use **an** with words that start with the letter **h** when the **h** is not pronounced: **an** hour, **an** honour

The

We use **the**:

1) before singular nouns that we have already mentioned with **a/an**:

*We saw **an** elephant. **The** elephant was standing under some trees.*

2) before singular, plural or uncountable nouns when we say exactly which person or thing we mean:

***The** people who live next door are really nice.*

*Where's **the** brown sugar?*

Note that we don't use **the** before plural and uncountable nouns when we are talking about things in general:

***Children** need plenty of exercise and fresh air. (children in general)*

***Sugar** isn't good for you. (sugar in general)*

3) We also use **the** before singular, plural or uncountable nouns when it is clear which person or thing we mean:

*I'm going to **the** supermarket. (the one we always go to)*

***The** children are upstairs. (our children)*

*Could you shut **the** door? (the door of this room)*

4) We use **the** before nouns when there is only one:

***The** sun is shining and there aren't any clouds in **the** sky.*

5) We use **the** with superlatives:

*You're **the** best dad ever!*

6) We use **the** in many expressions with 'of'

*In **the** middle of the night*

***The** Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*

*At **the** end of my holiday*

The or zero article?

Here are some rules:

Use **the** with

Countries with plural names or with Republic or Kingdom in the name: *The United Arab Emirates, The Netherlands, The United Kingdom*

Geographical areas in noun phrases: *I live in the north-west of Egypt, in the east*

The names of rivers, seas, oceans and mountain ranges: *The Mississippi, The Black Sea, The Atlantic, The Urals*

Parts of the day: *in the morning/afternoon/evening*

Most prepositional phrases of position and place: *at the top, on the left, at the office/bank/cinema*

Use **zero article (-)** with

The names of most countries, cities and continents: *Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Warsaw, Beijing, Europe, Asia*

Geographical areas in adjective phrases: *I live in (-) north-west Egypt, (-) eastern France*

The names of single mountains and lakes: *Mount Kilimanjaro, Lake Titicaca*

Exact days, months and times: *on (-) Friday, in (-) March, at (-) 7 o'clock*

Some prepositional phrases of place: *at (-) home, at (-) work, in (-) bed, at (-) sea*

Take note: school/university, etc.

There is a special rule for these places: school, university, college, hospital, prison, church. Compare these examples:

*The children go **to school** by bus. I go **to the school** to help twice a week.*

*Ben's studying maths **at university**. He works in the canteen **at the university**.*

*She was **in hospital** for three weeks. Is there a shop **in the hospital**?*

If someone is at the place because they are a student / are sick / a prisoner, etc, we don't use **the**. If they are there for another reason, or we are talking about the building, we use **the**.

Articles and adjectives

Adjectives go between articles and nouns: What **a great place** this is! I went on **an amazing trip**. We went to **the famous Bondi beach**.

Pronouncing articles

We usually pronounce **a/an** with a weak vowel sound /ə/ ('uh'). It sounds like the vowel sound in **fun**, and not the vowel sound in **cat**.

Before consonants and the letters **u** or **eu** when they are pronounced **y** (/j/), we pronounce **the** with this weak sound /ə/, too.

the doctor, the party, the uniform

But when **the** is before a vowel sound, we pronounce **the** with the long **ee** sound in **see**.

the afternoon, the ice, the open door, the upstairs rooms

