

Introduction to Articles (A, AN, THE or NOTHING (X))

Read the following story, and decide if you need to use "a" "an" "the" or nothing (X) for each of the blank spaces (1 - 38).

I am from (1) _____ Seattle, (2) _____ Washington. (3) _____ Seattle is (4) _____ city in (5) _____ United States. It is near (6) _____ border with (7) _____ Canada in (8) _____ northwest corner of (9) _____ USA. I live in (10) _____ town called (11) _____ Olympia which is not far from (12) _____ Pacific Ocean. I live in (13) _____ house in (14) _____ street in (15) _____ countryside. (16) _____ Street is called (17) _____ "Bear Street" and (18) _____ house is old - more than (19) _____ 100 years old! I am (20) _____ English teacher at (21) _____ school in (22) _____ center of (23) _____ town. I like reading (24) _____ books and taking (25) _____ photographs. I usually have (26) _____ lunch at (27) _____ school. I usually go home by (28) _____ car. We have all (29) _____ kinds of (30) _____ food in (31) _____ Olympia. I like (32) _____ Italian food very much. Sometimes, I go to (33) _____ Italian restaurant in (34) _____ Seattle. (35) _____ Restaurant is called (36) _____ "Luigi's". (37) _____ Italian food is (38) _____ great!

Here are some general rules for when to use "A", "AN", "THE" or NOTHING...

...look them over, then go back and see if you want to change any of your answers above.

a = indefinite article (not a specific object, one of a number of the same objects) with consonants.

She has a dog. = *one*

I work in a factory. = *one of a possible many*

an = indefinite article (not a specific object, one of a number of the same objects) with vowels* (a, e, i, o, u).

Can I have an apple? = *one*

* **vowel sounds**

She is an English teacher. = *one of a possible many*

the = definite article (a specific object that both the person speaking and the listener know).

The car over there is fast.

The food is very good, isn't it?

The first time you speak of something use "a" or "an", the next time you repeat that object use "the".

I live in a house. The house is quite old and has four bedrooms.

I ate in a Chinese restaurant. The restaurant was very good.

DO NOT use an article with countries, states, counties or provinces, lakes and mountains except when the country is a collection of states such as "The United States".

He lives in Washington near Mount Rainier.

They live in northern British Columbia.

USE an article with large bodies of water, oceans, seas and rivers.

My country borders on the Pacific Ocean.

DO NOT use an article when you are speaking about things in general.

I like Italian cuisine.

She likes reading books.

DO NOT use an article when you are speaking about meals, certain places, and transport.

He has breakfast at home.

I go to university.

He comes to work by taxi. = 'He takes a taxi to work.'

→ go 'BY' (e.g., car, bus, train...)*

→ take 'A' (e.g., car, bus, train...) somewhere

* **EXCEPTION** = go 'ON' foot

PRACTICE: Articles (A, AN, THE or NOTHING):

Look at the sentences below (1 - 20) and decide if you need to use "a" "an" "the" or nothing (X) for each of the blank spaces.

- (1) I have never seen ____ UFO.
- (2) David is ____ best student in our class.
- (3) May I ask you ____ question?
- (4) What is ____ name of the next station?
- (5) I only have ____ hour for lunch.
- (6) ____ Newcastle is ____ town in ____ north of England.
- (7) Is there ____ public telephone near here?
- (8) That was ____ interesting film!
- (9) Do you know where I left ____ car keys?
- (10) Anna was born in ____ Italy but she lives in ____ Great Britain now.
- (11) I wrote to him, but ____ letter never arrived.
- (12) ____ Tower of London is ____ popular tourist attraction.
- (13) ____ Gatwick Airport is in ____ southern England.
- (14) Does his name begin with ____ "F"?
- (15) I saw ____ bear when I was in ____ Yellowstone National Park.
- (16) They have two children, ____ boy and ____ girl.
- (17) I had ____ breakfast at 8:30 in ____ morning.
- (18) ____ Czech Republic, also known by its short-form name, ____ Czechia, is ____ landlocked country in ____ Central Europe.
- (19) They all agreed that they liked to eat ____ Chinese food.
- (20) I have ____ good idea.
- (21) There are ____ hundreds of millions of inhabitants in ____ U.S.
- (22) Chris has ____ evening job as ____ office cleaner.
- (23) Let's go for ____ drive in ____ country.
- (24) The young boy was not wearing ____ clothes.
- (25) ____ United Kingdom includes ____ Northern Ireland and ____ Wales.

Part 1: Read the following explanations of how we use zero article (no article) and the definite article (*the*). In pairs, match the examples (a-k) to the explanations (1-11).

We use **zero article** with plural and uncountable nouns when we talk generally about people or things, without definite people or things in mind. For example, we might talk about a whole class of things in a general way (1 b), or about an indefinite number (2) or indefinite amount (3).

We use **the** with singular, plural or countable nouns when we expect the reader to be able to identify the thing or person we are **referring** to in the following noun. This may be because:

- it is clear from the context (4).
- it is identified by information after the noun, often in an of-phrase (5).
- it is identified using a superlative adjective (6).
- it is identified using an adjective such as *first*, *main* or *primary* (7).
- there is only one of a particular thing or person (8).
- there is only one group of these things or people (9).

When we make generalizations about classes of things we can use either **the** with a singular noun (10) or **zero article** with a plural noun (11).

- a) ...**the primary purpose** of a map...
- b) Throughout history **maps** have become increasingly common...
- c) ...followed by **the printing press**, and then **the computer**.
- d) ...are now in widespread use by the public, through **the Internet**...
- e) ...navigation, **the science** of location and wayfinding.
- f) When ancient peoples began to sail **the oceans**...
- g) **The earliest** known **maps** were constructed of sticks...
- h) This view shows details of stags crossing a river, and experts suggest that some of **the artwork** represents a rudimentary map...
- i) **Geographers** who specialize in cartography...
- j) **Computers** have dramatically changed map data collection and display.
- k) **Information** that was once collected manually...

Part 2: Add **the** before the noun or noun phrase in bold in one of each of the following pairs of sentences (a or b).

1. a) World War I was a turning point in **history**.
b) He was a major figure in **history** of science.
2. a) I begin by describing **most significant risks** associated with outsourcing.
b) All people taking part in sport know that **risks** are unavoidable.
3. a) Fish is probably **main food** for most people living in coastal settlements.
b) **Food** that can be prepared and served quickly is referred to as 'fast food'.
4. a) In the 20th century there were many innovations in the material used in **painting**.
b) *Mona Lisa* is a 16th century portrait now in the Louvre in Paris. **Painting** shows a woman whose facial expression is often described as 'mysterious'.

Collective Nouns: are nouns which stand for a group or collection of people or things.

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They include words such as *audience, committee, police, crew, family, government, group, and team*.

In American English, most collective nouns are usually treated as singular, with a singular verb:

✓ The whole **family was** at the table.

✓ The **government is** doing a good job.

✓ He prefers an **audience that arrives** without expectations.

In British English, most collective nouns can generally be treated as singular or plural:

✓ The whole **family was** at the table. [singular collective noun; singular verb]

✓ The whole **family were** at the table. [plural collective noun; plural verb]

✓ The **government is** doing a good job. [singular collective noun; singular verb]

✓ The **government are** doing a good job. [plural collective noun; plural verb]

There are a **few** collective nouns (in both British and American English) that are **always** used with a plural verb, the most common of which are *police* and *people*:

✓ She's happy with the way the **police have** handled the case.

✗ She's happy with the way the **police has** handled the case.

✓ It's been my experience that **people are** generally forgiving.

✗ It's been my experience that **people is** generally forgiving.

If you aren't sure whether to use a singular or a plural verb with a collective noun, look it up. Most dictionaries will tell you which is correct.

A collective noun differs from a mass noun (i.e., "uncountable" :a noun that cannot be counted—e.g., *love, water, evidence*) because it can be pluralized.

The consensus among English grammar and usage authorities is that collective nouns sometimes take singular verb forms (e.g., *the team is*) and sometimes plural verb forms (*the team are*). But there are no clear rules, and in many cases either approach would work.

When the noun is treated collectively and the individuals within the group aren't important to the meaning of the sentence, singular verb forms work well—for example, *the team is in last place; the staff is in the meeting room; the family has moved out*. But plural verbs, at least in these examples, would not be considered incorrect.

When the meaning of the sentence requires that individuals within the group be differentiated, plural forms work better—for example, *the team have various training regimens; the staff are unable to agree among themselves; my family live all over the country*. These, however, might sound odd to some speakers of English. American-English speakers, in particular, tend to treat collective nouns as singular in most cases. In each of these examples, an American writer might insert members after the collective noun.

Another issue to be aware of, in both American and British English, is the fact that some believe it is a mistake to mix singular and plural subjects and verbs in the same sentence, paragraph, or piece of writing. They think that the following sentence is grammatically incorrect because the subject and verb in the first clause (*government is*) are singular and the subject and verb in the following clause (*they have*) are plural:

✗ The **government is** by no means environmentally perfect: **they have** invested only £37m in renewable energy sources this year.

According to this view, the sentence should be rewritten either as:

✓ The **government is** by no means environmentally perfect: **it has** invested only £37m in renewable energy sources this year.

or:

✓ The **government are** by no means environmentally perfect: **they have** invested only £37m in renewable energy sources this year.

HOWEVER, many people believe that the singular and plural forms can be mixed:

✓ The group gave **its** first concert in June and **they are** already booked up for the next six months.

✓ The team **is** in Detroit this weekend. **They have** a good chance of winning.

PRACTICE - Making Subjects and Verbs Agree

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Fill in the blank spaces in the sentences below (1 - 24) with either 'is' or 'are'.

- (1) There _____ not many people in the room.
- (2) Two minutes _____ not really enough time to answer the question.
- (3) The people who listen to that music _____ few.
- (4) There _____ little information available.
- (5) The team captain, as well as his players, _____ anxious.
- (6) The woman with all the dogs _____ walking down my street.
- (7) The book or the pen _____ in the drawer.
- (8) Your cholesterol level and blood pressure _____ things that you have to check from time to time.
- (9) Either answer _____ correct.
- (10) The news _____ on at six o'clock.
- (11) Five dollars _____ a lot of money.
- (12) Dollars _____ often used instead of rubles in Russia.
- (13) One of the boxes _____ open.
- (14) There _____ many questions.
- (15) There _____ never enough time to finish.
- (16) All of the books, including yours, _____ in that box.
- (17) Four hours of sleep _____ not enough to feel rested.
- (18) There _____ six plates on the table.
- (19) There _____ a lot of noise coming from next door.
- (20) In my neighborhood there _____ an outdoor swimming pool and two parks.
- (21) One or two of my friends _____ vegetarian.
- (22) Either my shoes or your coat _____ always on the floor.
- (23) Everyone _____ free to engage in peaceful political activity.
- (24) It will be essential to establish how the money _____ being spent.

The Basic Rules: Countable and Uncountable Nouns

A countable noun is one that can be **expressed** in plural form, usually with an "s." For example, "cat—cats," "season—seasons," "student—students."

An uncountable noun is one that usually cannot be expressed in a plural form. For example, "milk," "water," "air," "money," "food." Usually, you can't say, "He had many moneys."

Countable and Uncountable Nouns with Adjectives

Most of the time, this doesn't matter with adjectives. For example, you can say, "The cat was gray" or "The air was gray." However, the difference between a **countable** and **uncountable** noun does matter with certain adjectives, such as "some/any," "much/many," and "little/few."

Some/Any: **Some** and **any** countable and uncountable nouns.

- "There is **some** water on the floor."
- "There are **some** students here."
- "Do you have **any** food?"
- "Do you have **any** apples?"

Much/Many: **Much** **modifies** only uncountable nouns. **Many** modifies only countable nouns.

- "We don't have **much** time to get this done."
- "**Many** Americans travel to Europe."

Little/Few: **Little** modifies only uncountable nouns.

- "He had **little** food in the house."
- "The doctor had **little** time to think in the **emergency** room."

Few modifies only countable nouns.

NOTE: **Few** is a quantifier used with plural countable nouns.

- "There are **few** doctors in town."
- "**Few** students like exams."

Without the article "a," **few** emphasizes a small number of something.

Adding the article removes the emphasis — **a few** means **some**.

The same rule applies to **little**, which is used with singular uncountable nouns.

Other basic rules

A lot of/lots of: **A lot of/lots of** are informal **substitutes** for much and many. They are used with uncountable nouns when they mean much and with countable nouns when they mean many.

- "They have **lots of** (much) money in the bank."
- "**A lot of** (many) Americans travel to Europe."
- "We got **lots of** (many) mosquitoes last summer."
- "We got **lots of** (much) rain last summer."

NOTE: **A lot** means very often or very much.

It is used as an adverb. It often comes at the end of a sentence and never before a noun.

A little bit of: **A little bit of** is informal and always **precedes** an uncountable noun.

- "There is **a little bit of** pepper in the soup."
- "There is **a little bit of** snow on the ground."

Enough: **Enough** modifies both countable and uncountable nouns.

- "There is **enough** money to buy a car."
- "I have **enough** books to read."

Plenty of: **Plenty of** modifies both countable and uncountable nouns.

- "They have **plenty of** money in the bank."
- "There are **plenty of** millionaires in Switzerland."

No: **No** modifies both countable and uncountable nouns.

- "There is **no** time to finish now."
- "There are **no** squirrels in the park."

PRACTICE: Fill in the gaps in the sentences below (1 - 25) with the correct answer (a, b, c, or d).
CIRCLE your answer. There is ONLY ONE correct answer for each.

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- (1) Students don't seem to have _____ homework these days.
a) many b) plenty of c) much d) no
- (2) He still has _____ money, so he can go on holiday this year.
a) a little b) a few c) much d) little
- (3) _____ equipment is required to play hockey safely.
a) Many b) Enough c) A lot of d) Much
- (4) Look over there! I can see _____ people walking across the street.
a) no b) few c) much d) some
- (5) Were there _____ cars on the road?
a) a little bit of b) many c) some d) plenty of
- (6) Maria isn't very popular at school. She's got very _____ friends.
a) few b) much c) many d) little
- (7) There are 25 textbooks per class. That should be _____.
a) plenty of b) enough c) a few d) some
- (8) Gina speaks very _____ English, but she knows a few words.
a) few b) much c) no d) little
- (9) She put too _____ salt into the soup.
a) many b) few c) much d) plenty of
- (10) This car uses hardly _____ petrol.
a) any b) much c) some d) enough
- (11) I've already been to Ireland _____ times.
a) a few b) a little c) some d) much
- (12) Caroline shows _____ interest in mathematics.
a) enough b) little c) few d) many
- (13) Jack phoned Julia at home, but there was _____ answer.
a) a little b) no c) some d) any
- (14) If there are _____ phone calls from the office, let me know.
a) many b) any c) enough d) some
- (15) Are there _____ desserts for everyone?
a) some b) any c) enough d) no
- (16) Would you like _____ more coffee?
a) no b) a little bit of c) a few d) some
- (17) We've got _____ time before we need to leave for the airport.
a) any b) much c) plenty of d) no
- (18) Although the children are grown up, we still see them _____.
a) a lot of b) much c) many d) a lot
- (19) Was there _____ food at the party?
a) some b) much c) a little d) many
- (20) She has _____ money. She really can't afford to go out.
a) any b) little c) a few d) much
- (21) Last month our company increased the profit. We found _____ new customers.
a) a little b) a lot c) much d) a few
- (22) There are _____ pockets in these trousers.
a) no b) a little bit of c) any d) much
- (23) If you have a fever you should drink _____ fluids.
a) many b) any c) some d) plenty of
- (24) This is a very difficult piece of music to play - it demands _____ concentration.
a) enough b) a lot of c) plenty of d) many
- (25) Would you like _____ of chocolate?
a) plenty b) some c) a little bit d) any

Vocabulary Practice (selected vocab from WEEK 5):

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Complete the following sentences (1 - 24) by filling in the blank spaces with **the proper form of the word given for that sentence.**

You may use ONLY ONE word per blank space: DO NOT add any words [e.g. prepositions].

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| (1) ARRIVED | The train's scheduled time of _____ is 10:30. |
| (2) ATTRACTION | They made me a very _____ job offer. |
| (3) BASIC | The village has remained _____ unchanged for over 300 years. |
| (4) BORN | The application form will ask for your country/place of _____. |
| (5) CENTER | A huge bomb blast rocked _____ London last night. |
| (6) CHILDREN | Many _____ couples decide to adopt. |
| (7) CONCENTRATION | The company is _____ its resources on developing new products. |
| (8) COUNTABLE | The teachers _____ the students as they got on to the bus. |
| (9) EMERGENCY | Lifeguards are trained to deal with _____. |
| (10) EQUIPMENT | All the police officers were _____ with shields to defend themselves against the rioters. |
| (11) EXPRESSED | I could tell from the _____ on her face that something serious had happened. |
| (12) FAR | How much _____ is it to the airport? |
| (13) FEVER | I'm feeling a bit _____ - I hope it's not the start of flu. |
| (14) FEW | _____ people smoke these days than used to. |
| (15) GREAT | The whole is _____ than the sum of the parts. |
| (16) INTERESTING | Just out of _____, how old is your wife? |
| (17) MODIFIES | The design of the spacecraft is undergoing extensive _____. |
| (18) PHOTOGRAPHS | She's doing an evening class in _____. |
| (19) PRECEDES | Nouns are often _____ by adjectives |
| (20) PROFIT | Over the years it has developed into a highly _____ business. |
| (21) REFERRING | My old headteacher said he would write me a very good letter of _____ |
| (22) SUBSTITUTES | It looks as though the coach is going to make a _____. |
| (23) TEACHER | He _____ for several years before becoming a writer. |
| (24) USUALLY | The library is open for business as _____ despite the snowstorm. |