

Definite Article

Definition of Definite Article

The definite article “the” in grammar is a determiner that introduces or refers to a specific noun, or specifies the given noun. However, an indefinite article is opposite the definite article, because it does not specify anything. For example, “It is tempting, if *the* only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail” (*The Psychology of Science: A Reconnaissance*, by Abraham Maslow). In this [sentence](#), definite article “the” appears before the singular noun “tool,” and specifying it. However, the indefinite article “a” only tells that there is one hammer.

Common Use of Definite Article

“May I go to the college?”

“I saw him in the school. The boy was weeping.”

“The rose has beautiful smell.”

She is the brilliant student.

He is the first man to win Oscar award.

In these common examples, all definite articles have been used to specify the following nouns, such as “college,” “boy,” “rose,” “brilliant student,” and “first man,” respectively.

Characteristics of the Definite Article

The definite article can be used with various types of noun to form a variety of meanings.

Singular, countable noun – Used before a singular noun, something that can be counted, the definite article specifies which one is being referred to. For example, “The thief has run away.”

Plural, countable noun – It may be used before a plural countable noun, when the noun is specific, not general. For instance, “Police officers killed three of the robbers.”

Uncountable noun – It may be used before a noun, which is something that cannot be counted. For instance, “The sand is blown by wind.” Sand cannot be counted, though its individual grains can.

Particular noun – No definite article is used with a particular noun, such as “Mr. Washington.” Simply, one cannot be called “The Washington.” Nevertheless, a definite article can be used to introduce his family group of Mr. Washington: “The Washingtons live down the street.”

Names of countries – It is not used with the proper names of countries and towns, with few exceptions. Exceptions include: the United States, the Czech Republic, and the Netherlands.

Names of bodies of water – The names of some water bodies require definite articles, such as the Mississippi, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Indian Ocean, etc. However, there are additional exceptions, such as some lakes (i.e. Lake Michigan), which do not use a definite article.

Examples of Definite Articles in Literature

Example #1: *Charlotte's Web* (by E.B. White)

“She closed the carton carefully. First she kissed her father, then she kissed her mother. Then she opened the lid again, lifted the pig out, and held it against her cheek.”

See the underlined word “the,” which is a definite article, specifying the nouns “carton,” “lid,” and “pig.”

Example #2: *A Tale of Two Cities* (by Charles Dickens)

“As to this, his natural and not to be alienated inheritance, the messenger on horseback had exactly the same possessions as the King, the first Minister of State, or the richest merchant in London. So with the three passengers shut up in the narrow compass of one lumbering old mail coach ...”

This passage has used the definite articles to specify the nouns “messenger,” “King,” “Minister,” “merchant,” and “countable

passengers.” At one place, the definite article is specifying the noun along with superlative [adjective](#) “richest.”

Example #3: *Definite Article* (by Eddie Izzard)

“Horseshoes are lucky. Horses have four bits of lucky nailed to their feet. They should be the luckiest animals in the world. They should rule the country.”

In these lines, the definite article appears before the superlative adjective “luckiest” and before the noun “country” to specify it.

Example #4: *The Old Man and the Sea* (by Earnest Hemingway)

“In the first forty days a boy had been with him. But after forty days without a fish the boy’s parents had told him that the old man was now definitely and finally salao ... It made the boy sad to see the old man come in each day ...”

In this short paragraph, Hemingway has used definite articles before ordinal numbers, “first forty days,” and then before the nouns “old man,” and “boy.”

Function of Definite Article

The major function of a definite article is to emphasize the noun it is placed before. It specifies a noun that could be an [object](#), a person, a place, or a thing. It comes before a noun or a noun [phrase](#), and also before a superlative adjective, to point out the noun. It implies that a thing mentioned has already been pointed out or redefined. In other words, it clarifies the meaning of a noun. It helps the reader to understand the noun and its role in the sentence.