

Unit 12 Articles



12.1 The articles *a*, *an* and *the* are words that we put before a noun to show that we are referring to a known or specific person or thing, or to show that we are talking about a new or nonspecific people or thing.

Tony has **a** *bicycle*.

I like **the** *bicycle* you are riding.

We use *a* and *an* only with a singular noun, but we can use *the* with a singular or a plural noun.

Kate has **an** *aunt* in Shanghai.

The *flowers* in **the** *sitting room* are beautiful.

Did you move **the** *books*?



We usually use an uncountable noun without an article.

We must drink plenty of *water*.

Compare: He only drank **two glasses of**
water yesterday.

! Caution!

We must use an article before a singular, countable noun.

- ✗ Derek has *sister*.
- ✓ Derek has **a** *sister*.



12.2 The indefinite article *a* or *an* is used when:

- a singular countable noun is mentioned for the first time in a passage

I saw **a** car parked in front of our school.

- the listener doesn't know which person or thing a speaker refers to

Please pass me **a** ruler, Pete.

Compare: Please pass me **the** ruler on your desk.



- we have to define or describe something

An encyclopedia is a book full of information about different subjects.

! Caution!

We use *a* or *an* to talk about an example of something (meaning *any*).

- ✗ Mrs Chan loves *a* child.
- ✓ Mrs Chan loves **children**.
- ✓ **A** child can do this trick.



12.3 The choice of *a* or *an* is determined by the pronunciation of the word immediately following the article. We use *a* when the word starts with a consonant sound. When the word begins with a vowel sound, we use *an* (even if the letter is a consonant).

<p>a cup</p>	<p>an apple an egg</p> <p>an item an orange</p> <p>an umbrella</p>
<p>a house</p> <p>a hotel</p> <p>a horse</p>	<p>an hour</p> <p>an honest man</p> <p>an HSBC branch</p>



<p>a unit</p> <p>a university</p> <p>a uniform</p>	<p>an urgent message</p>
<p>a European</p> <p>a ewe</p>	<p>an event</p>
<p>a one-way ticket</p> <p>a once popular song</p>	<p>an organ</p>
<p>a T-shirt</p> <p>a VIP</p>	<p>an FBI agent</p> <p>an 18-year-old girl</p>



! Caution!

- ✗ Did you take *any* umbrella with you to work today?
- ✓ Did you take **an** umbrella with you to work today?
- ✗ The hotel is situated right next to *a* MTR exit.
- ✓ The hotel is situated right next to **an** MTR exit.



Grammar Practice



*Insert **a** or **an** where necessary to complete the sentences.
Put a cross (×) in the space if no article is needed. The first
two have been done for you as examples.*



12.4 The definite article *the* is used:

- when the thing mentioned is known to both the speaker and the listener

It's so cold in here. Please close **the** window.
(= the window in this room)

- when there is only one of something

It was a fine day. **The** sun was shining brightly.

More and more people are relying on **the** Internet for information.



- when the following nouns are used to express a general meaning

army

atmosphere

climate

countryside

environment

future

government

ground

mountain

past

piano

police

public

radio

sea

sky

telephone

violin

weather

wind

The wind has dropped.

Compare: **A** cold wind is blowing in from the north.

Can you play **the** guitar?

Compare: Derek bought **a** guitar yesterday.

- before *same*

Shelly and I live in **the** *same* building.

- with noun forms of adjectives that refer to a specific group of people, e.g. *the poor, the rich, the old, the young, the blind, the deaf*, etc.

A nurse's job is to look after **the** *sick*.



- before a superlative adjective or adverb (*the longest, the most exciting trip, etc.*)

This is **the** *most user-friendly* software I've ever used.

- to refer to people of a particular nationality or origin

The *Chinese* are often seen as hard-working people.



B Insert *the* where necessary to complete the sentences. Put a cross (✕) in the space if no article is needed. The first one has been done for you as an example.



12.5 Other points to remember:

- We can talk about something in general (*a type of plant, animal, etc.*) in two ways:
 - ✓ *Elephants* **are** the largest mammals that live on land.
 - ✓ **The** *elephant* **is** the largest mammal that lives on land.
 - × *The elephants* are the largest mammals on land.

Compare: *The elephants* in the zoo were old.



- We do not use **the** before nouns such as *school, college, university, church, hospital, town, prison, bed, etc.* when these places are used or visited for their main purpose.

They go to **church** on Sundays.

Compare: They went there to take a photograph of **the church**.



12.6 Sometimes the use of articles is not governed by any grammatical rules. It is just a matter of common usage. Look at the table below:

We say:	But we say:
go to school/church/ hospital/town	go to the office/cinema/ theatre/country
at home, leave home	in the house
at dawn/noon/midnight	in the morning/ afternoon/evening
at first/last	in the beginning/end



We say:	But we say:
have cancer/asthma	get a headache/cough/ fever get the flu get (a) toothache/ stomachache/backache



We say:

But we say:



We do not usually use the article *a/an* when we talk about the general condition or state of these illnesses.

Toothache is unbearable.

Compare:

I couldn't sleep last night. I had (a) toothache.



We say:	But we say:
at present	at the moment
in haste	in a hurry
at half price	at a discount
in darkness	in the dark



We say:	But we say:
in case of	in the event of
in order to	with a view to
got time to	have/haven't got the time to

