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Articles

(Level: Intermediate)

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What Is an Article?



It is a type of “determiner,” a word that determines whether a noun is definite or indefinite.

“Definite” means that something is unique, specific, or known.

“Indefinite” means that something is general, a member of a class/group, or unknown.

The definite article is “the.”

The indefinite article is “a” or “an.”

Sometimes nouns have no article.

There are nonarticle determiners, like “my,” “this,” and “that.”

The Definite Article: The



Particular things, including dates where the day is first:

The cat sat on the stairs.

My doctor appointment is on the 5th of June.

The names of landmarks, except lakes and single mountains:

the Ganges river, the Sahara desert, the Cascades mountain range

The names of classical/traditional musical instruments:

My sister plays the violin. Can you play the flute?

The/that/those thing(s) in question:

This is the store I was telling you about.

The Indefinite Article: A or An (1 of 2)



“A” comes before consonant sounds, “an” before vowel sounds.

a dog, a horse, a yellow car

an elephant, an hour (pronounced “an our”), an FBI agent (“an ef...”)

“A” and “an” can be used only with singular, countable nouns.

For plural and uncountable nouns, either “some,” “any,” or no article are used (see Slide 8 for examples).

A class or type of thing:

He is a citizen.

Can you help me get a job?

The Indefinite Article: A or An (2 of 2)



An informal way of saying “one,” except for 1100-1999:

a hundred dollars (\$100), an elephant (one elephant)

“An” is an Old English word for “one.”

Costs, frequencies, and measures:

That is a \$50 hat. I eat three meals a day. Please give me a 16-ounce cup.

Things in general:

He is having a hard time right now.

Things not in question:

That is just a photo, not the photo I was talking about.

No Article (1 of 3)



A person's title and name together:

President Obama, Mahatma Gandhi, Pope John Paul II

Beds and meals in general:

I'm going to bed now. When do you want to eat breakfast tomorrow?

Calendar years:

He was born in 2010 (two thousand ten).

Instruction manuals where all of the articles are definite:

Pound (the) nail with (the) hammer.

No Article (2 of 3)



Months and days of the week in general:

I'll visit next January. We always meet on Tuesday.

Newspaper headlines and public signs:

Stock Market Recovers! No littering beside road.

Schools and legal institutions in general:

What time do you go to school/court in the morning?

Exception: British and Canadian English may say “in/to hospital.”

The names of most countries, cities, lakes, and mountains:

China, Amsterdam, Lake Superior, Mount Everest

No Article (3 of 3)



The names of philosophies and religions:

She practices Buddhism. He disagrees with phenomenology.

When another determiner is used:

my car, her coat, many examples, this chair

exceptions: Consider the many issues at hand. I am such a person.

When talking in general about mass, plural, or uncountable nouns:

People can be foolish. I saw stars. Happiness cannot be measured.

“Some” can be added for positive statements: I do want some oranges.

“Any” can be added for negative statements: I don’t want any apples.

Thanks for watching!

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