

English Grammar – Articles ('the'/'a'/'an')

1) The Indefinite Article (a/an)

'a' is used in front of a word that begins with a consonant sound.

'an' is used in front of a word that begins with a vowel sound.

- Our town has **a** theater, **a** university, **a** large park and **a** library.
- Chinese people believe that **an** Englishman always carries **an** umbrella.
- I have **an** old car. It is **a** very old car.
- I have two cars, **a** Ford and **an** Audi.

Remember, it is the sound, not the spelling of a word that determines when to use **a** or **an** :

- The coastguard received **an** SOS.
- She spends **an** hour at the hairdresser every day.

In English, we use **a** or **an** in front of job names:

- Bob is **a** doctor.
- Jane is **an** architect.

We use **a** or **an** for frequency or speed:

- He earns \$200 **a** day.
- She goes to the gym twice **a** week.
- He always drives at 40 km **an** hour.

2) The Definite Article (the)

Unique things:

- **the** sun, **the** moon, **the** Atlantic Ocean, **the** sky, **the** Arctic Circle
- I have never visited **the** Tower of London
- Charles III is **the** King of England
- **the** Rolling Stones, **the** English Channel, **the** White House
- **the** EU, **the** BBC
- **the** United Nations, **the** Brazilian Navy, **the** British Army

Superlatives:

- He is **the** tallest man in the world.
- Brazil has **the** largest rainforest in the world.

Ordinal numbers:

- I live on **the** tenth floor of my building.
- She was born on **the** 28th of December.

Countries with plural names:

- **the** West Indies, **the** United States of America, **the** Philippines

Hotels:

- **the** Hilton, **the** Savoy, **the** Sheraton

3. When not to use 'the'

a) Names:

Names of Countries (singular)

- **Germany** is an important economic power.
- He travels to **Chile** every year.

Names of Languages

- People speak **French** in Tahiti.
- I love learning **German**.

Names of Meals

- **Lunch** is at midday.
- I always have wine with **dinner**.

Names of People

- **John** will come to my party.
- **Charles** is **Elizabeth's** son.

Names of Places

- We live in **London**.
- She lives near **Loch Ness**.
- We can get a bus at **Victoria Station**.
- Excuse me - where is **Oxford Street**?
- They will land at **Heathrow Airport**.
- Let's go to **McDonald's**.

Names of Companies

- Jeff Bezos owns **Amazon**.
- I prefer to travel with **Lufthansa**.
- I work for **Google**.

b) Uncountable nouns

- **Rice** is an important food in Asia.
- People drink **tea** with **milk** in England.
- **Love** is a strange emotion.

c) In front of the words 'home', 'bed', 'church', 'court', 'holiday', 'hospital', 'prison', 'work', 'school', 'college', 'university', 'TV'

- She stays in **bed** on Sundays until midday.
- I never want to go to **prison**.
- After he graduated from **school**, he went to **university**.
- My husband is at **work** today.
- I don't watch **TV** every day.
- We are at **home** today.

Exercise

1. Choose 'a' or 'an':

- I have _____ orange car.
- I have _____ big orange car.
- My father is _____ engineer and my mother is _____ nurse.
- It is _____ honour to meet you, your highness.
- This is _____ unique specimen.
- He goes abroad once _____ year.

2. Choose 'the' or nothing:

- I love _____ Eiffel Tower
- Let's go to _____ Italy next year.
- Let's go to _____ United Arab Emirates next year.
- I didn't see _____ Mary yesterday.
- I want to visit _____ Buckingham Palace.
- I always go to _____ church on Sundays.