

Explanations

Indefinite article (a/an)

- With something we refer to for the first time.
*I've just had **a great idea**. I'll give you **a call** next week.*
- With one of a group of things.
*Shall we choose **a book** from this catalogue?*
- Where we use an adjective to describe a noun.
*Cairo is **a very big city**. It's **a beautiful day**.*
- With someone's job.
*Peter is **a truck driver**.*
- With singular fractions, group numbers and large numbers.
*one and **a half** kilos **a dozen** eggs **a hundred** envelopes*
- Meaning *per*.
*He was doing ninety miles **an hour**.
Julie earns £500 **a week**.*

Definite article (the)

- With nouns we have mentioned previously.
*There is a bedroom and a living room. **The bedroom** is quite large.*
- With nouns we mention for the first time, but where it is clear which person or thing we are talking about.
*Can you pass **the marmalade**?
My life changed completely after **the war**.*
- Where there is only one of something. It is clear which one we are talking about.
***The moon** is full tonight.*
- With nouns followed by a descriptive phrase, which makes them definite.
*This is **the man I told you about**.*
See also the examples in brackets in the next section, paragraphs 4 and 7.
This category includes proper names with a descriptive phrase. Compare with the next section, paragraph 2:
*London Bridge BUT **the Tower of London***
- With national groups.
***The British** drink far too much tea.*
- With classes of people.
***The rich** get richer and **the poor** get poorer.*

- With individual items which represent a class.
The lion is fast disappearing.
- With names of musical instruments that we can play.
*I can't play **the piano** but I can play **the guitar**.*
- With some geographical names. In particular: oceans, seas, rivers, canals and regions.
*The Thames flows into **the North Sea**. **the Arctic***
Also with plural countries, or where the country name contains a noun.
the Netherlands** **the People's Republic of China
- With superlatives, ordinals, *the same*, *the only*.
*This is **the best**. You are **the first**. This is **the only one**.*
- With media.
*What's on (**the**) **television**? I went to **the cinema**.*
- With uncountable nouns and plural countable nouns when we are talking generally.
*Give **peace** a chance. Football is **life**.*
*I hate **wasps**. All he talks about is **cars**.*
- With most continents, countries, states, islands, mountains, lakes, cities, parks, roads and streets, squares, bridges, palaces, castles, cathedrals, stations and airports.
*We live in **France**. We took the train from **Paddington Station** to **Bath**.*
But see previous section, paragraph 9, for geographical names that use the definite article.
- With company names, years, months, days and special times of the year.
*She works for **Lufthansa**. I'll see you in **January**.*
- With names of meals when we are talking generally.
*It's time for **lunch**. (BUT **The lunch** I had at Café Sol was good value.)*
*What's for **dinner**? (BUT **The dinner** Sue gave us last night was delicious.)*
- With unique jobs or roles (the definite article is also possible in these cases).
*Jim is (**the**) **chairman** of the company.*
- With prepositions of place with certain buildings, where the purpose of the building is more important than the place itself.
*Sally is in **prison**. (she's a prisoner)*
*Sally is in **the prison**. (she's a visitor to that specific building)*
Similar are: *bed, church, class, court, hospital, school, university*
- With means of transport when we are talking generally.
*We went there by **car**. (BUT We went there in **the car** that Alex borrowed.)*
Note that if we use *in* or *on*, we need an indefinite article.
*We went there in **a car/on a bus**.*

Zero article
(no article)

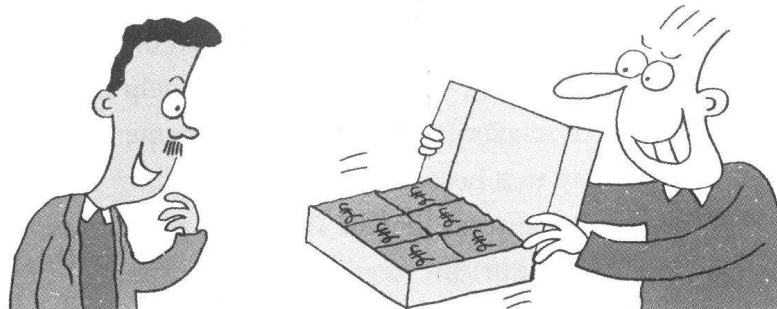
Practice

1 Put *a/an* or *the* in each space, or leave the space blank.

- a) We went by / - train to *the* west of England.
- b) people who live in Netherlands are called Dutch.
- c) judge sent me to prison for ten years.
- d) Columbus was one of first people to cross Atlantic.
- e) As captain of ship, I have complete authority.
- f) David learned to play violin when he was at university.
- g) Trafalgar Square is near Charing Cross Station.
- h) Did you read book I lent you last week?
- i) We'll put up shelves and then go to café for something to eat.
- j) Is that present Bill gave you for Christmas?

2 Underline the most suitable phrase in each sentence.

- a) Is this *a person/the person* you told me about?
- b) This is *the only cinema/an only cinema* in the area.
- c) Philip has just bought *the Thames barge/a Thames barge*.
- d) I'm going to *the British Museum/British Museum* this afternoon.
- e) Are you going to *church/the church* on Sunday?
- f) Do you have *a milk jug/milk jug*?
- g) *The Prime Minister/Prime Minister* will give a speech this afternoon.
- h) *The computer/Computer* has already changed our lives dramatically.
- i) I haven't been to *an open-air theatre/open-air theatre* before.
- j) Here is *a thousand pounds/the thousand pounds* I owe you.



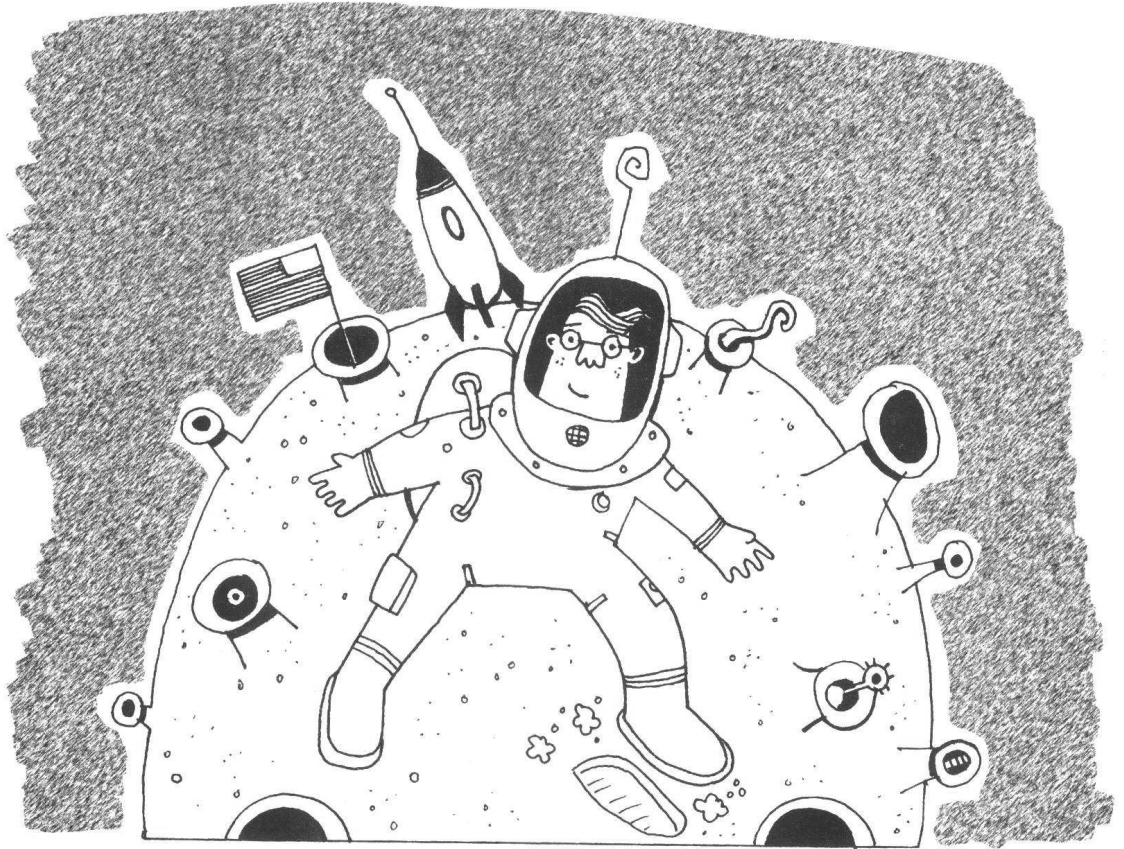
3 Complete each sentence with the most suitable word or phrase.

- a) The butler was^C..... I suspected.
 A) last person B) a last person C) the last person D) some last person
- b) Where you borrowed last week?
 A) is scissors B) are the scissors C) is some scissors D) are scissors
- c) Why don't we go to the park ?
 A) in the car B) with a car C) with car D) by the car
- d) Too much rubbish is being dumped in
 A) sea B) the sea C) a sea D) some sea
- e) This is exactly I was looking for.
 A) job B) a job C) some job D) the job
- f) Of all these cars, I think I prefer
 A) a Japanese B) some Japanese C) the Japanese one D) a Japanese one
- g) I try to go jogging at least four times
 A) the week B) of the week C) a week D) of a week
- h) Sally spent six months out of
 A) work B) a work C) the work D) some work

4 Complete each sentence (a-i) with one of the endings from 1-9. More than one answer may be possible.

- a) Some people say that the⁸.....
- b) Most people think that a/an
- c) I don't agree that
- d) I feel that a
- e) I don't believe that a/an
- f) I didn't realise that the
- g) It's incredible to think that a/an
- h) I didn't know that
- i) I think it's quite unfair that the
- 1 good job is an important part of life.
- 2 single injection can protect you from so many diseases.
- 3 hundred miles an hour is too fast even on a motorway.
- 4 the unemployed should receive more help from the state.
- 5 queen of England doesn't pay any income tax.
- 6 tiger may well become extinct very soon.
- 7 third of a person's income should be paid in tax.
- 8 English are difficult to get to know at first.
- 9 the Tower of London was built by William the Conqueror.

5 Put *a/an* or *the* in each space, or leave the space blank.



- a) Neil Armstrong made *the* first footprint on *the* Moon.
- b) There was accident yesterday at corner of
..... street.
- c) I need time to think about offer you made me.
- d) recipe for success is hard work.
- e) people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw
..... stones.
- f) worst part of living in a caravan is
lack of space.
- g) book you ordered last week is now in
..... stock.
- h) dancing is more interesting activity than
..... reading.
- i) people we met on holiday in
north of England sent us postcard.
- j) little knowledge is dangerous thing.

6 Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given. You must use between two and five words, including the word given.

- a) There is one problem here, and that's the weather.
only
 The *only problem here is* the weather.
- b) There are no good films on this week.
cinema
 There is nothing this week.
- c) Can't you swim faster than that?
fastest
 Is can swim?
- d) I haven't been here before.
time
 This is been here.
- e) A lot of wine is drunk in France.
French
 The a lot of wine.
- f) If you drive faster, it is more dangerous.
the
 The dangerous it is.
- g) It is difficult to discover what is true.
truth
 The discover.
- h) Are you a good pianist?
piano
 Can you well?

7 Underline the most suitable phrase in each sentence.

- a) I was *under an impression/under the impression* that you had left.
- b) I have to go. I'm *in a hurry/in hurry*.
- c) I managed to sell the old painting *at a profit/at profit*.
- d) I think I prefer the other restaurant *on the whole/on whole*.
- e) How many hours do you work, *on average/on the average*, every week?
- f) I was *in pain/in a pain* after I twisted my ankle.
- g) Jack recovered from his accident and is now *out of danger/out of the danger*.
- h) Excuse me, but you're *in the way/in a way*.
- i) Sue felt seasick on *the cross-channel ferry/a cross the channel ferry*.
- j) The burglar hit me on *my back of the neck/the back of my neck*.

8 Put *a/an* or *the* in each space, or leave the space blank.

- a) What's the use in taking / – medicine for *a* cold?
- b) Is happiness of majority more important than rights of individual?
- c) It's long way by train to north of Scotland.
- d) philosophers seem to think that life is mystery.
- e) most cars start badly on cold mornings.
- f) There was time when I enjoyed skating.
- g) Do you have reason for arriving late?
- h) When I arrive home I feel sense of relief.
- i) end of book is by far best part.
- j) friend always tells me answers to homework we have.

Key points

- 1 With some types of building, the meaning can change depending on the use of the article.
*Helen is **at** school.* (the purpose of the school is important – Helen is a student or a teacher)
*Helen is **at the** school.* (the building itself is important – it is the place where we can find Helen)
- 2 The use of the article can show something about the context of a short piece of text. In particular, whether an item has or has not been mentioned before.
*The BBC reported that **the** two men have since been recaptured.*
 Use of *the* shows that the two men have been mentioned before, and so this is an extract from a longer text.
- 3 Many uses of articles are idiomatic, and should be learned as part of a phrase.
*Diana works as **a** graphic designer.*

→ SEE ALSO

Grammar 21: Countable and uncountable nouns

Grammar 23: *All, no, none, each, every, either, neither*