

1 Articles and one, a little/a few, this, that

1 a/an (the indefinite article)

The form **a** is used before a word beginning with a consonant, or a vowel with a consonant sound:

a man *a had* *a university* *a European*
a one-way street

The form **an** is used before words beginning with a vowel (**a, e, i, o, u**) or words beginning with a mute **h**:

an apple *an island* *an uncle*
an egg *an onion* *an hour*

or individual letters spoken with a vowel sound:

an L-plate *an MP* *an SOS* *an 'x'*

a/an is the same for all genders:

a man *a woman* *an actor* *an actress* *a table*

2 Use of a/an

a/an is used:

A Before a singular noun which is countable (i.e. of which there is more than one) when it is mentioned for the first time and represents no particular person or thing:

I need a visa. They live in a flat. He bought an ice-cream.

B Before a singular countable noun which is used as an example of a class of things:

A car must be insured
All cars/Any car must be insured.
A child needs love
All children need/Any child needs love.

C With a noun complement. This includes names of professions:

It was an earthquake. She'll be a dancer. He is an actor.

D In certain expressions of quantity:

a lot of *a couple*
a great many *a dozen* (but *one dozen* is also possible)
a great deal of

E With certain numbers:

a hundred a thousand (See 349.)

Before **half** when **half** follows a whole number;

1 ½ kilos = one and a half kilos or a kilo and a half

But *½ kg = half a kilo* (no **a** before *half*), though *a + half + noun* is sometimes possible:

a half-holiday a half-portion a half-share

With *1/3, ¼, 1/5 etc.* **a** is usual: *a third, a quarter etc.*, but **one** is also possible. (See 350.)

F In expressions of price, speed, ratio, etc.:

5p a kilo £1 a metre sixty kilometres an hour
10 p a dozen four times a day

(Here **a/an** = **per**)

G In exclamations before singular, countable nouns:

Such a long queue! What a pretty girl! But
Such long queues! What pretty girls!

(Plural nouns, so no article. See 3.)

H **a** can be placed before Mr/Mrs/Miss + surname:

a Mr Smith a Mrs Smith a Miss Smith a Mr Smith

means 'a man called Smith' and implies that he is a stranger to the speaker. *Mr Smith*, without *a*, implies that the speaker knows Mr Smith or knows of his existence.
(For the difference between **a/an** and **one**, see 4. For **a few** and **a little**, see 5.)

3 Omission of **a/an**

- a/an** is omitted;
- A Before plural nouns.
a/an has no plural form. So the plural of *a dog* is *dogs*, and of *an egg* is *eggs*.
- B Before uncountable nouns (see 13).
- C Before names of meals, except when these are preceded by an adjective:
We have breakfast at eight.
He gave us a good breakfast.
- The article is also used when it is a special meal given to celebrate something or in someone's honour:
I was invited to dinner (at their house, in the ordinary way) but
I was invited to a dinner given to welcome the new ambassador.

4 **a/an** and **one**

A **a/an** and **one** (adjective)

- 1 When counting or measuring time, distance, weight etc. we can use either **a/an** or **one** for the singular:
£1 = a/one pound *£1,000,000 = a/one million pounds* (See chapter 36.)
But note that in *The rent is £100 a week* the **a** before *week* is not replaceable by **one** (see 2 F).
In other types of statement **a/an** and **one** are **not** normally interchangeable, because **one** + noun normally means 'one only/not more than one' and **a/an** does not mean this:
A shotgun is no good. (It is the wrong sort of thing.)
One shotgun is no good. (I need two or three.)
- 2 Special uses of **one**
- (a) **one** (adjective/pronoun) used with **another/others**:
One (boy) wanted to read, another /others wanted to watch TV.
(See 53.)
One day he wanted his lunch early, another day he wanted it late.
- (b) **one** can be used before *day/week/month/year/summer/winter* etc. or before the name of the day or month to denote a particular time when something happened:
One night there was a terrible storm.
One winter the snow fell early.
One day a telegram arrived.
- (c) **one day** can also be used to mean 'at some future date':
One day you'll be sorry you treated him so badly.
(*Some day* would also be possible.)
(For **one** and **you**, see 68.)

B **a/an** and **one** (pronoun)

- one** is the pronoun equivalent of **a/an**:
Did you get a ticket? ~ Yes, I managed to get one.
- The plural of **one** used in this way is **some**:
Did you get tickets? ~ Yes, I managed to get some.

5 **a little/a few** and **little/few**

- A **a little/little** (adjectives) are used before uncountable nouns:
a little salt/little salt
- a few/few** (adjectives) are used before plural nouns:
a few people/few people
- All four forms can also be used as pronouns, either alone or with of:
Sugar? ~ A little, please.
Only a few of these are any good.

B **a little, a few** (adjectives and pronouns)
a little is a small amount, or what the speaker considers a small amount, **a few** is a small number, or what the speaker considers a small number.
only placed before **a little/a few** emphasises that the number or amount really is small in the speaker's opinion:

Only a few of our customers have accounts.

But **quite** placed before **a few** increases the number considerably:

I have quite a few books on art. (quite a lot of books)

C **little and few** (adjectives and pronouns)
little and **few** denote scarcity or lack and have almost the force of a negative:

There was little time for consultation.

Little is known about the side-effects of this drug.

Few towns have such splendid trees.

This use of **little** and **few** is mainly confined to written English (probably because in conversation **little** and **few** might easily be mistaken for **a little/a few**). In conversation, therefore, **little** and **few** are normally replaced by **hardly any**. A negative verb + **much/many** is also possible:

We saw little = We saw hardly anything/We didn't see much.

Tourists come here but few stay overnight =

Tourists come here but hardly any stay overnight.

But **little** and **few** can be used more freely when they are qualified by *so, very, too, extremely, comparatively, relatively etc.* **fewer** (comparative) can also be used more freely.

I'm unwilling to try a drug I know so little about.

They have too many technicians, we have too few.

There are fewer butterflies every year.

D **a little/little** (adverbs)

1 **a little** can be used:

(a) with verbs: *It rained a little during the night.*

They grumbled a little about having to wait.

(b) with 'unfavourable' adjectives and adverbs:

a little anxious a little unwillingly

a little annoyed a little impatiently

(c) with comparative adjectives or adverbs:

The paper should be a little thicker.

Can't you walk a little faster?

rather could replace **a little** in (b) and can also be used before comparatives (see 42), though **a little** is more usual. In colloquial English **a bit** could be used instead of **a little** in all the above examples.

2 **little** is used chiefly with **better** or **more** in fairly formal style:

His second suggestion was little (= not much) better than his first.

He was little (= not much) more than a child when his father died.

It can also, in formal English, be placed before certain verbs, for example *expect, know, suspect, think*:

He little expected to find himself in prison.

He little thought that one day . . .

Note also the adjectives *little-known* and *little-used*:

a little-known painter a little-used footpath

6 **the** (the definite article)

A Form

the is the same for singular and plural and for all genders:

the boy the girl the day

the boys the girls the days

B Use

The definite article is used:

1 When the object or group of objects is unique or considered to be unique:

the earth the sea the sky the equator the stars

- 2 Before a noun which has become definite as a result of being mentioned a second time:
His car struck a tree; you can still see the mark on the tree.
- 3 Before a noun made definite by the addition of a phrase or clause:
the girl in blue the man with the banner
the boy that I met the place where I met him
- 4 Before a noun which by reason of locality can represent only one particular thing:
Ann is in the garden, (the garden of this house)
Please pass the wine, (the wine on the table)
Similarly: *the postman* (the one who comes to us), *the car* (our car), *the newspaper* (the one we read).
- 5 Before superlatives and *first, second* etc. used as adjectives or pronouns, and only:
the first (week) the best day the only way
- C **the** + singular noun can represent a class of animals or things:
The whale is in danger of becoming extinct.
The deep-freeze has made life easier for housewives.
But *man*, used to represent the human race, has no article:
If oil supplies run out, man may have to fall back on the horse.
the can be used before a member of a certain group of people:
The small shopkeeper is finding life increasingly difficult.
the + singular noun as used above takes a singular verb. The pronoun is **he, she** or **it**:
The first-class traveller pays more so he expects some comfort.
- D **the** + adjective represents a class of persons:
the old = old people in general (see 23)
- E **the** is used before certain proper names of seas, rivers, groups of islands, chains of mountains, plural names of countries, deserts, regions:
the Atlantic the Netherlands
the Thames the Sahara
the Azores the Crimea
the Alps the Riviera
and before certain other names:
the City the Mall the Sudan
the Hague the Strand the Yemen
the is also used before names consisting of noun + **of** + noun:
the Bay of Biscay the Gulf of Mexico
the Cape of Good Hope the United States of America
the is used before names consisting of adjective + noun (provided the adjective is not *east, west* etc.):
the Arabian Gulf the New Forest the High Street
the is used before the adjectives *east/west* etc. + noun in certain names:
the East/West End the East/West Indies
the North/South Pole
but is normally omitted:
South Africa North America West Germany
the, however, is used before *east/west* etc. when these are nouns:
the north of Spain the West (geographical)
the Middle East the West (political)
Compare *Go north* (adverb: in a northerly direction) with *He lives in the north* (noun: an area in the north).
- F **the** is used before other proper names consisting of adjective + noun or noun + **of** + noun:
the National Gallery the Tower of London
It is also used before names of choirs, orchestras, pop groups etc.:
the Bach Choir the Philadelphia Orchestra the Beatles
and before names of newspapers (*The Times*) and ships (*the Great Britain*).

- G **the** with names of people has a very limited use. **the** + plural surname can be used to mean 'the . . . family':
the Smiths = Mr and Mrs Smith (and children)
the + singular name + clause/phrase can be used to distinguish one person from another of the same name:
We have two Mr Smiths. Which do you want? ~ I want the Mr Smith who signed this letter.
the is used before titles containing **of** (*the Duke of York*) but it is not used before other titles or ranks (*Lord Olivier, Captain Cook*), though if someone is referred to by title/rank alone **the** is used:
The earl expected . . . The captain ordered . . .
 Letters written to two or more unmarried sisters jointly may be addressed *The Misses* + surname: *The Misses Smith*.

7 Omission of **the**

- A The definite article is not used:
- 1 Before names of places except as shown above, or before names of people.
 - 2 Before abstract nouns except when they are used in a particular sense;
Men fear death but *The death a/the Prime Minister left his party without a leader.*
 - 3 After a noun in the possessive case, or a possessive adjective:
the boy's uncle = the uncle of the boy *It is my (blue) book = The (blue) book is mine.*
 - 4 Before names of meals (but see 3 C):
The Scots have porridge/or breakfast but *The wedding breakfast was held in her/other's house.*
 - 5 Before names of games: *He plays golf.*
 - 6 Before parts of the body and articles of clothing, as these normally prefer a possessive adjective:
Raise your right hand. fie took off his coat.
 But notice that sentences of the type:
She seized the child's collar.
I patted his shoulder.
The brick hit John's face.
 could be expressed:
She seized the child by the collar.
I patted him on the shoulder.
The brick hit John in the face.
 Similarly in the passive:
He was hit on the head. He was cut in the hand.
- B Note that in some European languages the definite article is used before indefinite plural nouns but that in English **the** is never used in this way:
Women are expected to like babies, (i.e. women in general)
Big hotels all over the world are very much the same.
 If we put **the** before *women* in the first example, it would mean that we were referring to a particular group of women.
- C *nature*, where it means the spirit creating and motivating the world of plants and animals etc., is used without **the**:
If you interfere with nature you will suffer for it.

8 Omission of **the** before **home**, before **church**, **hospital**, **prison**, **school** etc. and before **work**, **sea** and **town**

- A **home**
 When *home* is used alone, i.e. is not preceded or followed by a descriptive word or phrase, **the** is omitted:
He is at home.
home used alone can be placed directly after a verb of motion, i.e. it can be treated as an adverb:

He went home. I arrived home after dark.

But when *home* is preceded or followed by a descriptive word or phrase it is treated like any other noun:

They went to their new home.

We arrived at the bride's home.

For some years this was the home of your queen.

A mud hut was the only home he had ever known.

B **bed, church, court, hospital, prison, school/college/university**
the is not used before the nouns listed above when these places are visited or used for their primary purpose. We go:

to bed to sleep or as invalids *to hospital* as patients

to church to pray *to prison* as prisoners

to court as litigants etc. *to school/college/university* to study

Similarly we can be:

in bed, sleeping or resting *in hospital* as patients

at church as worshippers *at school* etc. as students

in court as witnesses etc.

We can be/get back (or be/get home) *from school/college/university*.

We can leave school, leave hospital, *be released* from prison.

When these places are visited or used for other reasons **the** is necessary:

I went to the church to see the stained glass.

He goes to the prison sometimes to give lectures.

C **sea**

We go to *sea* as sailors. To be *at sea* = to be on a voyage (as passengers or crew).

But to go *to* or be *at the sea* = to go to or be *at the seaside*. We can also live *by/near the sea*.

D **work and office**

work (= place of work) **is** used without **the**:

He's on his way to work. He is at work.

He isn't back from work yet.

Note that *at work* can also mean 'working'; *hard at work* = working hard:

He's hard at work on a new picture.

office (= place of work) needs **the**: *He is at/in the office.*

To be *in office* (without **the**) means to hold an official (usually political) position. To be *out of office* = to be no longer in power.

E **town**

the can be omitted when speaking of the subject's or speaker's own town:

We go to town sometimes to buy clothes.

We were in town last Monday.

9 **this/these, that/those** (demonstrative adjectives and pronouns)

A Used as adjectives, they agree with their nouns in number. They are the only adjectives to do this.

This beach was quite empty last year.

This exhibition will be open until the end of May.

These people come from that hotel over there.

What does that notice say?

That exhibition closed a month ago.

He was dismissed on the 13th. That night the factory went on fire.

Do you see those birds at the top of the tree?

this/these/that/those + noun + *of* + *yours/hers* etc. or *Ann's* etc. is sometimes, for emphasis, used instead of *your/her* etc. + noun:

This diet of mine/My diet isn't having much effect.

That car of Ann 's/Ann's car is always breaking down.

Remarks made with these phrases are usually, though not necessarily always, unfavourable,

B **this/these, that/those** used as pronouns:

This is my umbrella. That's yours.

These are the old classrooms. Those are the new ones.

Who's that (man over there)? ~ That's Tom Jones.

After a radio programme:

That was the concerto in C minor by Vivaldi.

this is is possible in introductions:

ANN (to TOM): *This is my brother Hugh.*

ANN (to HUGH): *Hugh, this is Tom Jones.*

TELEPHONE CALLER: *Good morning. This is/I am Tom Jones . . .*

I am is slightly more formal than *This is* and is more likely to be used when the caller is a stranger to the other person. The caller's name + *here* (*Tom here*) is more informal than *This is*. **those** can be followed by a defining relative clause:

Those who couldn't walk were carried on stretchers.

this/that can represent a previously mentioned noun, phrase or clause:

They're digging up my mad. They do this every summer.

He said I wasn't a good wife. Wasn't that a horrible thing to say?

C this/these, that/those used with one/ones

When there is some idea of comparison or selection, the pronoun **one/ones** is often placed after these demonstratives, but it is not essential except when **this** etc. is followed by an adjective:

This chair is too low. I'll sit in that (one).

I like this (one) best.

I like this blue one/these blue ones.