**The****Indefinite Article**

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| To facilitate pronunciation, ***a*** is used in front of any word that begins with a [consonant](http://www.davidappleyard.com/english/grammar.htm" \l "Pronunciation" \t "_self) or consonant-like vowel sound.  Conversely, ***an*** is put in front of any word that begins with a pure vowel sound or a mute *'h'*. | Our town has a theatre, a university, a large park and a conference hall.     Many Chinese still believe an Englishman always carries an umbrella.  It's an old custom. It's a strange old custom. |
| Note that spelling is *not* a reliable indicator of when to use ***a*** or ***an****.* | The coastguard received an SOS. He spent an hour standing in line. |
| The indefinite article ***a***or ***an*** is placed in front of a[countable noun](http://www.davidappleyard.com/english/grammar.htm" \l "Noun" \t "_self) that is being mentioned for the very first time. Once introduced, all further references to it can be preceded by the definite article ***the***. | I have two cars: a Ford and an Audi. The Ford is white and the Audi is silver. |
| In English, an indefinite article is needed in front of professions. | She is an architect and he is a doctor. |
| The indefinite article can also be used instead of *per*when giving the rate or pace of something. | He earns $200 a day. She swims twice a week. He drove at 60 miles an hour. |
| Note too that *little* and *few* become a whole lot more positive when preceded by the indefinite article. | She has a little money and a few friends, so she'll probably get by.  *Compare:*  She has little money and few friends, so I doubt if she'll get by. |

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**The****Definite Article**

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| The definite article ***the*** is used in front of any noun the listener or reader already knows about. | I have two cars: a Ford and an Audi. The Ford is white and the Audi is silver. |
| ***The*** is also used when the existence of something is common knowledge, or comes as no surprise because of the context in which it is mentioned. | Last week a fighter plane crashed into a field, but the pilot managed to eject safely.  Yesterday I spent the afternoon at home.  I threw my work clothes into the washing machine and went outside to sit in the garden. |
| The definite article is used in front of things generally regarded as unique. | The sun, the moon, the sea, the sky, the Arctic Circle, theenvironment, the capital, the air, the ground, etc. |
| Because nouns preceded by [superlative adjectives](http://www.davidappleyard.com/english/grammar.htm#Adjective) and[ordinal numbers](http://www.davidappleyard.com/english/grammar.htm#Number) are by their very nature unique, they too require the definite article.  *Exception:*  Spoken American English drops ***the*** in dates. | It was the worst day of my life!  The captain was the first person to leave the sinking cruise liner.   BrE  June the twenty-first. The twenty-first (day) of June.  AmE  June twenty-first. |
| The definite article is used in front of countable nouns representing a whole class or category of something. | The computer has changed our lives.  It is left up to the consumer to decide which one to buy.  We all have a duty to look after the old and infirm.  The blue whale is thought to be the largest animal ever to have lived. |
| ***The*** is used in front of oceans, seas, rivers, island and mountain chains, deserts, countries with plural names, and noun forms of points of the compass. | The Pacific, the Mediterranean, the Amazon, the West Indies, the Rockies, the Sahara, the Netherlands, the Far East, etc. |
| ***The*** is used in titles and place names including ***of***. | It is unlikely the Queen of Denmark has ever swum in the Bay of Bengal. |
| In the case of official job titles, ***the*** is usually dropped if there is only one such incumbent at any given time. | Margrethe II is (the) Queen of Denmark.  Donald was elected chairman of the board. |
| ***The*** is also used in proper names consisting of noun(s) and/or adjective(s) + noun. | The Empire State Building, the English Channel, theWhite House, the Royal Festival Hall, the Rolling Stones,the Berlin Philharmonic (Orchestra), the British Museum, the Titanic, etc. |
| ***The*** is used in hotel names. | The Hilton Hotel, the Savoy, the Sheraton |
| ***The*** is used for newspapers. | The Times, The Baltimore Sun, The Australian |
| ***The*** is used for many larger organizations and institutions (not [commercial enterprises](http://www.davidappleyard.com/english/articles.htm#Zero_Article)), including those with initials that are normally spelled out.   Acronyms (initials read as whole words) are treated in the same way as regular names ([proper nouns](http://www.davidappleyard.com/english/grammar.htm" \l "Proper_noun" \t "_self)) and so do not require any article. If you are uncertain, please monitor usage in the media or consult a dictionary. | The Commonwealth, the Fed, the EU, the WHO, theBBC, the FDA, the IAEA, etc. *Compare:* OPEC, NATO, ICANN, etc. |
| ***The*** is used for currencies. | The U.S. dollar has risen against the yen but fallen against the euro. |
| In front of people's names, ***the*** is only used to avoid confusion. | I'm the David Appleyard that lives in Japan. |
| ***The*** is used with the names of musical instruments. | Richard Clayderman plays the piano. |
| ***The*** can be used instead of a possessive form when referring to parts of the body and items of clothing. | She was hit on the head by a snowball (= a snowball hit her head).  Joe grabbed the youth by the collar (= Joe grabbed the youth's collar). |
| Many forms of entertainment are preceded by the definite article ***the***, although not usually the medium of television. | I go to the cinema/movies, the theatre, the circus, the ballet, or the opera.  In the daytime I listen to the radio, but in the evenings I prefer to watch television. |

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**The****Zero Article**

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| No article is needed before abstract nouns used in a general sense. | Love is all you need.  Crime is a growing problem in the inner cities. |
| No article is needed for most places consisting of just the name of a person, or the name of a person/place followed by a noun. | Harrods, Macys, McDonald's, Lloyds Bank, St. Paul's Cathedral, Buckingham Palace, Kennedy Airport, Waterloo Station, Cambridge University, etc. |
| No article is usually needed in front of company names. | Cisco Systems, Microsoft, CBS, EMI, Hitachi, Lufthansa, Facebook, etc |
| An article is unnecessary in official job titles if there is only one person holding this position at any given time. | Philip Hammond is (the) Chancellor of the Exchequer.  *Compare:* Philip Hammond is a Cabinet minister. |
| No article is needed in front of *most* roads, streets, parks, squares or bridges. | Oxford Street, Orchard Road, Central Park, Times Square, Tower Bridge, etc. |
| No article is needed in the names of single mountains, only mountain ranges. | While in New Zealand I climbed Mount Cook, which is the highest peak in the Southern Alps. |
| No article is needed before the names of meals, unless it is a formal occasion. | Roger had breakfast in his hotel room.  *Compare:* I attended a dinner at the Rotary Club. |
| No article is needed for the names of games or sports. | Anna Kournikova plays tennis to keep in shape. |
| No article is needed before *bed, church, court, hospital, prison, school, college, university,* etc. when these are used for their primary purpose.   If, however, they are used for any other purposes, ***the*** is required. | She stayed in bed on Sunday morning instead of going to church.    The angry customer threatened to take him to court.    The aging dissident was released from prison.    After graduating from high school he went to university.   *Compare:* She sat on the bed while she changed her socks.   He entered the church to photograph its interior.   Some decorators forgot a ladder in the prison, and found the place empty when they came back for it. |
| Articles are not needed in more abstract expressions of situation like *to/at sea, to/at/out of work, in/out of town, in/out of office,* etc.  If, however, you start talking about somewhere concrete or some place in particular, then the definite article ***the*** is required. | My uncle first went to sea at the age of 15. He used to spend several months at sea.    I go to work every day. I was at work yesterday.   Jack's been out of work for almost a year.   What's on in town (= my local town) this weekend?  Pat's out of town (= the town she lives in) until Tuesday.    This government has been in office for about a year now. The opposition parties would dearly love to vote it out of office.   *Compare:* I went to the sea/seaside to swim.  I stayed by the sea/seaside all day.   What's on in the town (= a particular town, not necessarily my own) this weekend?  How do I get out of the town?   Sally spent all day in the office (= her workplace). She didn't get out of the office much before 7 o'clock. |
| No article is needed before television as a medium, only as an appliance. | Carol saw her brother on television.  *Compare:* She had placed a photo of her dog on the television. |
| There is no article before a noun followed by a categorizing letter or number. | The students have just read section C.  The Chicago train is about to depart from track 5.  Her flight leaves from gate 32.  He fell asleep on page 816 of *War and Peace*.  She is staying in room 689. |
| To give added punch, articles are often dropped in the titles of books, movies, music and other works of art.  Even if an article exists in the original title, as in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, people tend to omit this when making reference to the work in everyday speech or writing. | *Journey into Hell* sounds even more thrilling  than *The Journey into Hell*.   "Have you read *Lord of the Rings*right through?" |
| To save space and boost impact, articles are usually dropped in headlines. | "Iraqi Head Seeks Arms"  "Stolen Painting Found by Tree"  "Police Confirm Shotgun Attack on Bullet Train" |