Definite and indefinite articles

What is an article?

Basically, articles are either definite or indefinite. They combine to a noun to indicate the type of reference being made by the noun.

- The definite article is the.
- The indefinite article is a / an.

The indefinite article a or an:

The article a / an is used when we don't specify the things or people we are talking about:

- I met a friend.
- I work in a factory in New York.
- I borrowed a pencil from a passenger sitting next to me.

The indefinite article a is used before a consonant sound:

- a dog.
- a pilot
- a teacher.
- a university

NOTE:
Although 'university' starts with the vowel 'u', it is not pronounced as such. It is pronounced as a consonant sound /juː.nɪvɜːsi.ti/.

The indefinite article an is used before a vowel sound:

- an engineer.
- an elephant.
- an athlete

The definite article the:

It's used when the speaker talks about a specific object that both the person speaking and the listener know.

- The car over there is fast.
- The president of the United States is giving a speech tonight.

When we speak of something or someone for the first time we use a or an, the next time we repeat that object we use the definite article the.
- I live in a house. The house is quite old and has four bedrooms.
- I ate in a Chinese restaurant. The restaurant was very good.

**No article:**

1. Do not use an article with countries, states, counties or provinces, lakes and mountains except when the country is a collection of states such as "The United States".
   - He live in **Washington** near **Mount Rainier**.
   - They live in **Northern British Columbia**.
   - They climbed **Mount Everest**.

2. We do not normally use an article with plurals and **uncountable** nouns to talk about things in general.
   - He writes books.
   - She likes sweets.
   - Do you like jazz music?
   - She ate bread with butter in the morning.

**Countable and uncountable nouns**

Using English articles with **countable** and **uncountable** nouns may be confusing.

**The** can be used with **uncountable** nouns, or the article can be dropped entirely as mentioned above.

1. "The two countries reached **the peace** after a long disastrous war" (some specific peace treaty) or "The two countries reached **peace** after a long disastrous war" (any peace).
2. "He drank **the water**" (some specific water- for example, the water his wife brought him from the kitchen) or "He drank **water**." (any water)

It is unusual to use **a/an** for uncountable nouns. You can't say "I'd like a milk"

**a/an** can be used only with **countable** nouns.

1. I'd like **a piece** of cake.
2. I lent him a book.
3. I drank **a cup** of tea.
Grammar Exercise - Definite and Indefinite Articles

Do the exercise below on definite and indefinite articles and click on the answer button to check your answers.

Choose the correct definite or indefinite article: "the", "a", "an" or "x" (zero article).

1. I bought [ ] pair of shoes.
2. I saw [ ] movie last night.
3. They are staying at [ ] hotel.
4. Look at [ ] woman over there! She is a famous actress.
5. I do not like [ ] basketball.
6. That is [ ] girl I told you about.
7. [ ] night is quiet. Let's take a walk!
8. [ ] price of gas keeps rising.
10. Juan is [ ] Spanish.
11. I read [ ] amazing story yesterday.
12. My brother doesn't eat [ ] chicken.
13. [ ] love is such [ ] beautiful thing.
15. I would like [ ] piece of cake.
16. I was in [ ] Japanese restaurant. [ ] restaurant served good food.
17. Sara can play [ ] guitar.

Grammar Exercise - Definite Article Zero Article

Do the exercise below on articles and click on the button to check your answers.

(Before doing the exercises you may want to read the lesson on articles)

Definite article (the) or zero article (X)

1. Did you get married after leaving [ ] university?
2. I was at [ ] train station when you called me.
3. I left ___ work at six o'clock pm.
4. They are opening ___ new shops here.
5. She was returning from ___ school when I met her.
6. She has a strong alibi. She was at ___ cinema at the moment the crime was committed.
7. Are you going to ___ beach this afternoon?
8. He went to ___ prison for domestic violence.
9. The kids are sitting at ___ table eating cereals.
10. Are you at ___ home?

Answers

1. I bought a ✓ pair of shoes.
2. I saw a ✓ movie last night.
3. They are staying at a ✓ hotel.
4. Look at the ✓ woman over there! She is a famous actress.
5. I do not like X ✓ basketball.
6. That is the ✓ girl I told you about.
7. The ✓ night is quiet. Let's take a walk!
8. The ✓ price of gas keeps rising.
10. Juan is X ✓ Spanish.
11. I read an ✓ amazing story yesterday.
12. My brother does not eat X ✓ chicken.
13. X ✓ love is such a ✓ beautiful thing.
15. I would like a ✓ piece of cake.
16. I was in a ✓ Japanese restaurant. The ✓ restaurant served good food.
17. Sara can play the ✓ guitar.
18. Did you get married after leaving X ✓ university?
19. I was at the ✓ train station when you called me.
20. I left X ✓ work at six o'clock pm.
21. They are opening X ✓ new shops here.
22. She was returning from X ✓ school when I met her.
23. She has a strong alibi. She was at the ✓ cinema at the moment the crime was committed.
24. Are you going to the beach this afternoon?
25. He went to prison for domestic violence.
26. The kids are sitting at the table eating cereals.
27. Are you at home?