Writing Development: Articles

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**Topic:** usingdefinite, indefinite and zero articles.

1. **Articles in English**

How many articles are there in English?

Below are examples of where articles can and cannot be used

**Indefinite Definite Zero**

*Singular countable noun* **a** wolf **the** wolf - - - -

*Plural countable noun* - - - - **the** wolves wolves

*Uncountable noun* - - - - **the** water water

1. **Specific use of the definite article**
   1. **When identity has already been established**

e.g. I saw a ghost*. The* ghost…

* 1. **When the noun is modified by another word or expression**

e.g. *The* feeling I have is difficult to describe.

* 1. **Unique use (the only one)**

e.g. *The* moon, *The* sun

* 1. **Generic use**

*The* tiger is an endangered species

* 1. **Specific objects**

Musical instruments *the* guitar

Ships *the* Titanic

Seas, oceans, channels *the* Atlantic Ocean, *the* English Channel

Mountain ranges *the* Himalayas

Groups of islands *the* Channel Islands

Geographical areas *the* north of England

Rivers *the* Amazon

Deserts *the* Sahara Desert

Hotels *the* Hilton

Cinemas & theatres *the* Apollo Theatre

Compound country names *the* UK, *the* USA, *the* Republic of France

Universities as noun phrases *the* University of Wales

**Definite articles are generally not used before:**

Countries, towns/cities, universities/colleges, streets, squares, languages

1. **Specific use of the indefinite article**
   1. To introduce a new piece of information

e.g. She saw *a* ghost

* 1. To generalise

e.g. *A* cow has horns

* 1. One

e.g. Pass me *a* knife please

* 1. Quantifying expressions

e.g. *a* hundred, *a* million

* 1. Per

e.g. Fifty miles *an* hour, three times ­*a* day

* 1. Exclamations with an adjective

e.g. What *a* beautiful view

1. **Specific use of zero articles**
   1. Institutions referred to by name (not as a noun phrase)

e.g. Ceredigion College, Aberystwyth University

* 1. Meals

e.g. Breakfast, lunch, dinner

* 1. Modes of transportation

e.g. Travelling by bicycle protects the environment

* 1. Before genitive expressions

e.g. John’s coat, my book, your hat

1. **Check your own writing**

Look through your writing. Underline every article you have used. Have they been used appropriately? Also look for examples of the examples mentioned above. Do you need to add any articles where they are missing?

**Further reading:**

**Huckin, T.N. & Olsen, L.A. (1991).** *Technical Writing and Professional Communication for Nonnative Speakers of English* (Second Edition). New York: McGraw Hill.

This worksheet is not based on the above reference source, but in-depth specific advice can be found in:

Chapter 29 (Pp 503-513): Indefinite Articles

Chapter 30 (Pp 514-530): The Definite Article

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