

# Agreement between subject and verb (2)

A

With **any of, each of, either of, neither of, or none of** and a **plural noun/pronoun** we can use a *singular* or *plural* verb. However, we are more likely to use a singular verb in careful written English.

- I don't think **any of them** *knows* (or *know*) where the money is hidden.
- Neither of the French athletes** *has* (or *have*) won this year.

With **a/the majority of, a number of, a lot of, plenty of, all (of), or some (of)** and a **plural noun/pronoun** we use a *plural* verb. But if we say **the number of**, we use a *singular* verb.

- A number of** refugees *have* been turned back at the border.
- The number of** books in the library *has* risen to over five million.

After **one of** and a **plural noun/pronoun** we use a *singular* verb. However, after **one of + plural noun/pronoun + who** we can often use either a singular or plural verb, although a plural verb is more grammatical.

- One of the reasons** I took the job *was* that I could work from home.
- He's **one of those teachers** who *insist/insists* on pupils sitting silently in class.

With **any of, none of, the majority of, a lot of, plenty of, all (of), some (of)** and an **uncountable noun** we use a *singular* verb.

- All the furniture** *was* destroyed in the fire.
- None of the equipment** *appears* to be damaged.

With **every** or **each** and a **singular noun** or **co-ordinated noun (x and y)** we use a *singular* verb. (For **each of**, see above.)

- Every room** *looks* over the harbour.
- Every boy and girl** *takes* part in the activity.
- Each child** *has* drawn a picture. *but*
- The children** *have each* drawn a picture.

With **everyone, everybody, everything** (and similar words beginning **any-, some-** and **no-**) we use a *singular* verb.

- Practically **everyone** *thinks* that Phil should be given the job.

B

When a subject has two or more items joined by **and**, we usually use a plural verb:

- Jean and David** *are* moving back to Australia.

However, phrases connected by **and** can also be followed by singular verbs if we think of them as making up a single item:

- Meat pie and peas** *is* Tom's favourite at the moment. (or *...are...*)
- The lorry, its cargo and passengers** *weighs* around 35 tonnes. (or *...weigh...*)

C

When a subject is made up of two or more items joined by **(either)...or...** or **(neither)...nor...** we use a singular verb if the last item is singular (although a plural verb is sometimes used in informal English), and a plural verb if the last item is plural:

- Either the station or the cinema** *is* a good place to meet. (or *...are...* in informal English)
- The President or his representatives** *are* to attend the meeting.

If the last item is singular and previous item plural, we can use a singular or plural verb:

- Either the teachers or the principal** *is* to blame for the accident. (or *...are* to blame...)

D

In **there + be/have** (see Unit 95) we use a singular verb form with singular and uncountable nouns and a plural form with plural nouns. However, in informal speech we often use a shortened singular form of **be** or **have** (= **There's**) with plural nouns:

- Over the last few years **there** *have* been many **improvements** in car safety.
- There's** been lots of good films on lately. (or **There've** been...)

We often do the same with **how/here/where + be/have**:

- How's** your mum and dad these days? (or **How are...**?)

41.1 For each set of sentences, choose an appropriate noun or phrase from (i) and a verb from (ii). Use the present simple for the verb, active or passive as appropriate. If both singular and plural verb forms are possible, give them both. (A)

- (i) 

his early paintings	<del>my children</del>
Dr Jones's acquaintances	the food

 (ii) 

know	remain	<del>remember</del>	taste
------	--------	---------------------	-------

- 1 a I'd be surprised if any of my children remember/ remembers my birthday.  
 b It's unlikely that any of ..... . It seems that he destroyed most of the work he produced during the 1930s.  
 c I don't think any of ..... particularly good. In fact, the restaurant is rather disappointing.  
 d An investigation is underway to discover whether any of ..... where he is.

- (i) 

other museums	vegetarians
victims	medicines

 (ii) 

charge	exceed	expect	relieve
--------	--------	--------	---------

- 2 a Mainly because of the recent health scares involving beef and chicken, the number of ..... to rise dramatically in the next five years.  
 b You can still go into the National Museum for free, although a number of ..... in the capital ..... people for entry.  
 c A number of ..... the symptoms of influenza, but none can cure it.  
 d It is estimated that the number of ..... of the flooding ..... a hundred thousand, and further deaths are anticipated.

- (i) 

player	the cars	the pieces
these factors		

 (ii) 

influence	last	test	try
-----------	------	------	-----

- 3 a The whole concert includes 20 short items from young musicians. Each of ..... about 5 minutes.  
 b There are four major influences on exchange rates: price levels, tariffs, preference for imported goods, and productivity. Here we investigate how each of ..... the exchange rate.  
 c The aim of the game is quite simple. Each ..... to buy as many properties on the board as possible.  
 d Each of ..... for safety, fuel economy and reliability.

41.2 Complete the sentences with present simple forms of the verb in brackets. If both a singular and plural form are possible, give them both. (A-D)

- 1 Plenty of European football clubs ..... interested in signing Nilsen from Rowham City, but the Rowham manager has said that no-one at the club ..... Nilsen to leave. (*bel want*)  
 2 The majority of those questioned ..... that the government's economic policies have failed, although neither the Prime Minister nor the Education Minister ..... indicated that these policies will change. (*think/ has*)  
 3 "It's the first time that either of us ..... been to China, but everyone we've met here ..... been very welcoming and helpful." (*have/ have*)  
 4 Professor Smith and Dr Peters ..... that the wreck of the ship and its cargo ..... a danger to local people fishing near the island. (*claim/ constitute*)  
 5 "Oh, good, sausages and chips ..... my favourite." "Sorry, all the sausages ..... gone, but there ..... plenty of chips left if you want some." (*be/ has/ be*)

# Agreement between subject and verb (3)

**A** Some nouns are usually plural and take a plural verb. These include **belongings, clothes, congratulations, earnings, goods, outskirts, overheads, particulars** (= information), **premises** (= building), **riches, savings, stairs, surroundings, thanks**. The noun **whereabouts** can be used with either a singular or a plural verb. The nouns **police** and **people** always take a plural verb, and the noun **staff** usually does:

- The company's **earnings** *have increased* for the last five years.
- Police** *believe* that Thomas is in Brazil, although his exact **whereabouts** *are/is* unknown.
- Staff** *say* that the new computer system has led to greater levels of stress in their work.

**B** Some nouns always end in -s and look as if they are plural, but when we use them as the subject they have a singular verb:

- The **news** from the Middle East *seems* very encouraging.

Other words like this include **means** (= 'method' or 'money'); some academic disciplines, e.g. **economics, linguistics, mathematics, phonetics, physics, politics, statistics**; some sports, e.g. **athletics, gymnastics**; and some diseases, e.g. **diabetes, measles, rabies**. However, compare:

<i>academic subject</i>	<i>general use</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Politics</b> <i>is</i> popular at this university.	<input type="checkbox"/> Her <b>politics</b> <i>are</i> bordering on the fascist. (= political belief)
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Statistics</b> <i>was</i> always my worst subject.	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Statistics</b> <i>are</i> able to prove anything you want them to. (= numerical information)
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Economics</b> <i>has</i> only recently been recognised as a scientific study.	<input type="checkbox"/> The <b>economics</b> behind their policies <i>are</i> unreasonable. (= the financial system)

**C** Although the words **data** and **media** (= newspaper, television, etc.) are plural (with singular forms **datum** and **medium**), they are commonly used with a singular verb. However, in formal contexts such as academic writing a plural verb is preferred. Notice that other similar plurals such as **criteria** and **phenomena** (with singular forms **criterion** and **phenomenon**) are always used with plural verbs. Compare:

- All the **data** *is* available for public inspection. (*or ...are available...*) *and*
- I agree that the **criteria** *are* not of equal importance. (*not ...the criteria is not...*)

**D** With a phrase referring to a measurement, amount or quantity we usually prefer a singular verb:

- Only **three metres** *separates* the runners in first and second places. (*rather than ...separate...*)
- The **fifty pounds** he gave me *was* soon spent. (*rather than ...were...*)

and a singular verb must be used when the complement is a singular noun phrase (e.g. a long time):

- Three hours** *seems* a long time to take on the homework. (*not Three hours seem...*)

After **per cent** (also **percent** or **%**) (**of**) we use a singular verb if the **per cent** phrase refers to a singular or uncountable noun and a plural verb if it refers to a plural noun. Compare:

- An inflation rate** of only 2 per cent *makes* a big difference to exports. *and*
- I would say that about 50 per cent **of the houses** *need* major repairs.

However, where we use a singular noun that can be thought of as either a whole unit or a collection of individuals, we can use either a singular or plural verb:

- Some 80 per cent **of the electorate** *is* expected to vote. (*or ...are expected...*)

## 42.1 Make any necessary corrections to the underlined verbs. (A-D)

- 1 Dr Jones's whereabouts has been kept a closely guarded secret by his family.
- 2 Bill Clinton's politics was inspired by John Kennedy.
- 3 Phenomena such as sun spots have puzzled scientists for centuries.
- 4 Some 30 per cent of the milk drunk in the country are imported.
- 5 When the soldiers got lost in the jungle, their only means of survival were to eat berries.
- 6 Over the last decade the company's overheads has increased dramatically.
- 7 The research data was collected during the period 12<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> July 2002.
- 8 You don't need much sugar for this pudding; ten grams are enough.
- 9 Modern linguistics is often said to have begun at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- 10 Congratulations goes to Richard Branch for his excellent exam results.
- 11 The coastal surroundings of the village is particularly attractive.
- 12 Nowadays politics seem to be more about saving money than changing society for the better.
- 13 He feels that the media have criticised him unfairly.
- 14 I know people often have to wait for hospital treatment, but two years seems ridiculously long.
- 15 Measles have killed a large number of children in the Nagola region.
- 16 Further particulars about the house are available from the owner.
- 17 Around 90 per cent of the concert audience was over 60 years old.
- 18 Ten kilometers are a long way to run if you're not fit.
- 19 If athletics are neglected in schools, this will have a big impact on future national teams.
- 20 People says the house is haunted.
- 21 Recent statistics provide firm evidence of a rapid increase in living standards in Asia.
- 22 About 60 per cent of the people questioned wants cars to be banned from the town centre.

## 42.2 Complete these extracts from newspaper articles with a singular or plural form of the verbs in brackets. If both singular and plural forms are possible, give them both. (A-D; also Unit 40)

- 1 The outskirts of our cities ..... (*have*) benefited from the new out-of-town shopping centres that ..... (*have*) recently been built.
- 2 On average, 25 litres of water ..... (*be*) used each day by each household and it is anticipated that as the population ..... (*expect*) higher living standards, this figure will rise.
- 3 It has been found that some 30 per cent of the office space in London ..... (*be*) presently empty and the Department of Employment ..... (*blame*) high property prices.
- 4 Three centimetres ..... (*be*) all that separated the first two runners in last night's 10,000 metres and the sports club ..... (*have*) declared the race a dead-heat.
- 5 The research group now ..... (*admit*) that the criteria they used in the work ..... (*be*) not totally reliable.
- 6 Following last week's major art theft from the Arcon Art Gallery, the premises ..... (*be*) searched by police last night and the owner's belongings ..... (*have*) been taken away for further inspection.
- 7 A survey of the opinions of British students ..... (*show*) that economics ..... (*be*) the least popular subject studied at university. However, 90 per cent of all those economics students surveyed ..... (*believe*) that their courses are well taught.
- 8 Sufferers from diabetes ..... (*have*) welcomed the launch by Federex of a new drug to combat the disease. The company ..... (*say*) that earnings from the drug ..... (*be*) to be put back into further research.

# Compound nouns and noun phrases

**A** In a compound consisting of **noun + noun**, often the second noun gives the general class of things to which the compound belongs and the first noun indicates the type within this class. The first noun usually has a singular form:

- **an address book** (= a book for addresses; *not* an addresses book)

However, there are a number of exceptions. These include –

☆ when the first noun only has a plural form:

- **a savings account**    **a customs officer**    **a clothes shop** (compare **a shoe shop**)  
**the arms trade** (arms = weapons)    **a glasses case** (glasses = spectacles. Compare ‘a glass case’ = a case made of glass)    **an arts festival** (arts = music, drama, film, dance, painting, etc. Compare ‘an art festival’; art = painting, drawing and sculpture)

☆ when we refer to an institution (an industry, department, etc.), such as

- **the building materials industry**    **the publications department**  
which deals with more than one kind of item or activity (different types of building material, different forms of publication).

Notice that to make a compound noun plural we usually make the second noun plural:

- **coal mine(s)**    **office-worker(s)**    **tea leaf/tea leaves**

**B** Sometimes a **noun + noun** is not appropriate and instead we use **noun + -’s + noun** (possessive form) or **noun + preposition + noun**. In general, we prefer **noun + -’s + noun** –

☆ when the first noun is the user (a person or animal) of the item in the second noun:

- **a baby’s bedroom**    **a lion’s den**    **a women’s clinic**    **a girls’ school**    **birds’ nests**

☆ when the item in the second noun is produced by the thing (often an animal) in the first:

- **goat’s cheese**    **duck’s eggs**    **cow’s milk**

(Note, however, **lamb chops** and **chicken drumsticks** (= the lower part of a chicken’s leg))

☆ when we talk about parts of people or animals; but we usually use **noun + noun** to talk about parts of things. Compare:

- **a woman’s face**    **a boy’s arm**    *but*    **a pen top**    **a computer keyboard**

We prefer **noun + preposition + noun** –

☆ when we talk about some kind of container together with its contents. Compare:

- **a cup of tea** (= a cup with tea in it)    *and*    **a tea cup** (= a cup for drinking tea from)

☆ when the combination of nouns does not refer to a well-known class of items. Compare:

- **income tax** (a recognised class of tax)    *and*    **a tax on children’s clothes** (*rather than* ‘a children’s clothes tax’)

☆ in the phrases **bird of prey**    **rule of thumb**    **Chief of Staff**    **commander-in-chief**    **sister-in-law**

Notice that we usually make a plural form of these phrases by making the first noun plural (e.g. **birds of prey**). However, we can say either **sisters-in-law** or **sister-in-laws** (and **brothers-in-law** or **brother-in-laws**, etc.).

**C** Some compound nouns are made up of verbs and prepositions or adverbs, and may be related to a two- or three-word verb (see Unit 94). Compare:

- **Mansen broke out** of the prison by dressing as a woman. (= escaped) *and*
- There was a major **break-out** from the prison last night. (= prisoners escaped)

Countable compound nouns like this have a plural form ending in **-s**:

- **read-out(s)**    **push-up(s)**    **intake(s)**    **outcome(s)**

However, there are exceptions. For example:

- **looker(s)-on** (*or onlooker(s)*)    **runner(s)-up**    **passer(s)-by**    **hanger(s)-on**

**D** We can form other kinds of hyphenated phrases that are placed before nouns to say more precisely what the noun refers to:

- a **state-of-the-art** (= very modern) computer    **day-to-day** (= regular) control

43.1 Study the italicised text and make corrections where necessary. (A & B)

- 1 Tom worked for a long time in (a) *the parks department*, but a few years ago he retrained, and now he's (b) *a computers programmer*. Of course, what he really wants to be is (c) *a films star!*
- 2 I was waiting at (a) *the bus stop* this morning when a cyclist on her way to the (b) *girl school* up the road got knocked off her bike. Someone got out of a car without looking and (c) *the car's door* hit her. She was very lucky not to be badly hurt, although she did have (d) *a head cut*.
- 3 I shouldn't be long at (a) *the corner shop*. I've just got three things on my (b) *shopping list* – (c) *a milk bottle*, (d) *a biscuit packet*, and (e) *some toothpaste*. I'll also look for (f) *some goat's cheese*, but I don't think they'll have any.
- 4 The tracks on his latest CD range from (a) *love songs* to (b) *pollution songs*.
- 5 Mary hated going into her grandfather's old (a) *tools shed*. It was full of (b) *spider webs*.
- 6 When Sue was cleaning her (a) *armchair*, she found a lot of things that had slipped down the back. There was an old (b) *pen top*, a piece from (c) *the 500-pieces jigsaw puzzle* that her daughter had been doing, and her (d) *glass case* with her sunglasses inside.

43.2 First underline the two-word verbs in sentences 1–5, then complete sentences 6–10 with appropriate compound nouns related to these two-word verbs. (C)

- 1 Dennis tried to cover up the fact that he had gambled and lost most of his money.
- 2 It is reported that cholera has broken out in the refugee camp.
- 3 I'm flying to Sydney, but I'm stopping over in Singapore for a few days on the way.
- 4 On the first Friday of each month, a few of us get together and play ten-pin bowling.
- 5 We set out from the camp early in the morning, hoping to reach the summit by midday.
- 6 The minister was taken ill in Iceland during a short ..... on his way back to Canada.
- 7 We didn't have a big party for Jane's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, just a family .....
- 8 Allegations of a ..... of a major leak of radioactive waste from the nuclear power plant have been strongly denied by the Energy Ministry.
- 9 Only two years ago there was a serious ..... of malaria in the town.
- 10 Even at the ..... of the expedition, they knew they had little chance of crossing the desert.

43.3 Complete the phrases in (i) with a word from (ii) and then use them in the sentences below. To help you, the meaning of the phrase is given in brackets. (D)

(i) <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">-day-to-</td> <td style="border: none; padding: 0 10px;">down-to-</td> <td style="border: none; padding: 0 10px;">larger-than-</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none; padding: 0 10px;">man/woman-in-the-</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">once-in-a-</td> <td style="border: none; padding: 0 10px;">step-by-</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none; padding: 0 10px;">middle-of-the-</td> <td style="border: none; padding: 0 10px;">round-the-</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	-day-to-	down-to-	larger-than-	man/woman-in-the-	once-in-a-	step-by-	middle-of-the-	round-the-		(ii) <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: none; padding: 0 10px;">clock</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">-day</td> <td style="border: none; padding: 0 10px;">earth</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none; padding: 0 10px;">life</td> <td style="border: none; padding: 0 10px;">lifetime</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">road</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none; padding: 0 10px;">step</td> <td style="border: none; padding: 0 10px;">street</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	clock	-day	earth	life	lifetime	road	step	street		
-day-to-	down-to-	larger-than-																		
man/woman-in-the-	once-in-a-	step-by-																		
middle-of-the-	round-the-																			
clock	-day	earth																		
life	lifetime	road																		
step	street																			

- 1 Although the Managing Director of Transcom was involved in major decisions, she left the day-to-day running of the company to her staff. (*routine*)
- 2 The Party will never regain power unless it can persuade ..... voters that it has rid itself of corruption. (*not politically extreme*)
- 3 Since the attempt to assassinate him last year, the Defence Minister has been given ..... protection by the police. (*all day and all night*)
- 4 The bookcase came with simple, ..... instructions on how to assemble it. (*progressing from one stage to the next*)
- 5 When the comet passes close to Earth next week, scientists will have a ..... opportunity to study its effects on our atmosphere. (*very rare*)
- 6 Terry has a refreshing, ..... approach to management. He's much less concerned with theory than with getting things done in the most efficient way possible. (*practical*)
- 7 The ..... isn't interested in the finer points of the government's tax policy. They just want to know if they are going to take home more or less pay. (*ordinary person*)
- 8 Her father was a ..... character who was well known throughout the village for his eccentric way of dressing and outspoken views. (*more exaggerated than usual*)

## A/an and one

A

We use **a** before nouns and noun phrases that begin with a consonant sound. If the noun or noun phrase starts with a vowel *letter* but begins with a consonant *sound*, we also use **a**:

- a** university (/ə ju:n.../)    **a** European (/ə juər.../)    **a** one-parent family (/ə wʌn.../)

We use **an** before words that begin with a vowel sound:

- an** orange    **an** Italian    **an** umbrella

These include words that begin with a silent letter 'h':

- an** hour    **an** honest child    **an** honour    **an** honorary degree

and abbreviations said as individual letters that begin with A, E, F, H, I, L, M, N, O, R, S or X:

- an** MP (/ən em pi:t/)    **an** FBI agent (/ən ef bi: ai.../)    **an** IOU (/ən ai əʊ ju: /)

But compare abbreviations said as words:

- a** NATO general (/ə neɪtəʊ.../)    **a** FIFA official (ə fi:fə.../)    *but* **an** OPEC meeting (/ən əʊpek.../)

Notice that we say

- a** history (book)    *but* **an** (or **a**) historical (novel)

B

We use **a/an** (not **one**) to talk about a particular but unspecified person, thing or event:

- I really need **a** cup of coffee.  
 You never see **a** police officer in this part of town, do you?

We also use **a/an**, not **one**, in number and quantity expressions such as:

- three times **a** year    half **an** hour    a quarter of **an** hour    a day or so (= 'about a day')  
50 cents **a** (= each) litre (notice we can also say '50 cents for one litre')  
a week or two (= somewhere between one and two weeks; notice we can also say 'one or two weeks')  
a few    a little    a huge number of...

We use **a** rather than **one** in the pattern **a...of...** with possessives, as in:

- She's **a** colleague **of** mine.  
 That's **a** friend **of** Bill's.

C

Before a singular countable noun **one** and **a/an** both refer to one thing:

- We'll be in Australia for **one** year. (or ...**a** year.)  
 Wait here for **one** minute, and I'll be with you. (or ...**a** minute...)

Using **one** in sentences like these gives a little more emphasis to the length of time, quantity, amount, etc.:

- He weighs **one** hundred and twenty kilos! Would you believe it! (using **one** emphasises the weight more than using **a**)

However, we use **one** rather than **a/an** if we want to emphasise that we are talking about *only* one thing or person rather than two or more:

- Do you want **one** sandwich or two?  
 Are you staying **only one** night?  
 I just took **one** look at her and she started crying.

We use **one**, not **a/an**, in the pattern **one...other/another**:

- Close **one** eye, and then the **other**.  
 Bees carry pollen from **one** plant to **another**.

We also use **one** in phrases such as **one day**, **one evening**, **one spring**, etc. to mean a particular, but unspecified day, evening, spring, etc.:

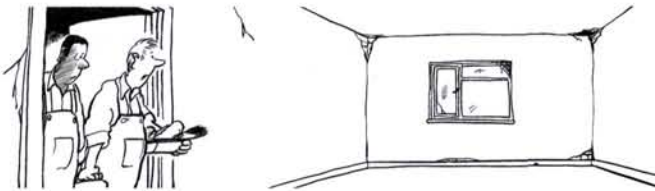
- Hope to see you again **one** day.  
 **One** evening, while he was working late at the office...

## 44.1 Write a or an in the spaces. (A)

- |                           |                            |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 ..... unpaid bill       | 8 ..... U-turn             |
| 2 ..... DIY shop          | 9 ..... heirloom           |
| 3 ..... MA in Russian     | 10 ..... NASA space launch |
| 4 ..... Euro              | 11 ..... UN decision       |
| 5 ..... MiG fighter plane | 12 ..... SOS message       |
| 6 ..... Olympic medal     | 13 ..... F grade           |
| 7 ..... AGM               | 14 ..... hero              |

## 44.2 Change a/an or one in these sentences if necessary, or write ✓. In which sentences are both a/an and one possible? (B & C)

- I usually go to the gym four times one week.
- There's more than one way to solve the problem.
- I phoned the council to complain, but just got passed on from a person to another.
- The rate of pay is really good here. You can earn over £20 one hour.
- Maybe we could go skiing one winter.
- The apples are 50 cents one kilo.
- Are you hungry? Would you like one piece of cake?
- The rules say that there is only one vote per member.
- You can get seven hours of recording on one disc.
- 'What would Nick like for his birthday?' 'Why don't you ask Emma? She's one good friend of his and will have some ideas.'
- There's one pen on the floor. Is it yours?
- The library books are due back in one month.
- Do you want some of my chips? There are too many here for a person.
- I'm going to London for one day or two.
- Either I'll work late tonight or I'll come in early tomorrow, but the report's got to be finished by lunchtime a way or another.
- It will take more than one morning to finish the decorating.



## 44.3 Which is more appropriate, a/an or one? If both a/an and one are possible, write them both. (B & C)

- If you wait ..... second I'll get my coat and come too.
- I want to see the river ..... last time before I leave.
- The Queen is visiting the city ..... day in November.
- It was announced that the plane would be approximately ..... hour late.
- I could hear the sound of ..... helicopter in the distance.
- I'd just like to say ..... thing before I go.
- Martha's baby is ..... year old already.
- Dinner should be ready in ..... hour or so.
- Paul came over ..... evening last week.
- I've painted ..... wall already and I'll do the other tomorrow.
- I'd like to make ..... point here, Ken, if I may.
- ..... large number of people had gathered in the square.



## A/an, the and zero article (1)

A

We usually use **the** when we talk about things which are unique – there is only one of them (or one set of them):

- the world    the sky    the atmosphere    the sun    the ground    the climate    the sea  
the horizon    the human race    the environment    the travel industry    the arms trade

We also refer to general geographical areas with **the** as in:

the beach    the country    the countryside    the town    the seaside    the forest  
where 'the country' or 'the countryside' means 'the area where there are no towns'. We also talk about:

- the past    the present    the future

Notice, however, that some nouns like this can be used with **zero article** (i.e. no article) to refer to a concept in general:

- Climate** is one of the many factors involved in changing farming methods. (or **The climate**...)  
 The flowers grow best in sandy soil and **sun**. (= sunshine)  
 In autumn the temperature difference between **land** and **sea** reduces. (or ...**the land** and **the sea**...)

If we want to describe a particular instance of these we can use **a/an**. Compare:

- I could see the plane high up in **the sky**. *and*  
 When I woke up there was **a bright blue sky**.  
 What are your plans for **the future**? *and*  
 She dreamt of **a future** where she could spend more time painting.

B

We can use **the** when we make generalisations about classes of things using singular countable nouns. (See also Unit 47A.) Compare the use of **the** and **a/an** in these sentences:

- The computer** has revolutionised publishing. (this refers to computers in general) *but not*  
A computer has revolutionised publishing. (computers *in general* have done this, not an individual computer)  
 **The computer** is an important research tool. *and*  **A computer** is an important research tool. (this statement is true of both the general class and the individual item)

As an alternative to **the + singular countable noun** we can use a plural countable noun to talk about a class of things:

- Computers** are an important research tool.

Notice that if **the** is used with plural and uncountable nouns we refer to a specific thing or group:

- The computers** have arrived. Where shall I put them?  
 **The music** was wonderful. I could have listened to the orchestra all night.

When we define something or say what is typical of a particular class of people or things, we generally use **a/an** rather than **the**:

- A corkscrew** is a gadget for getting corks out of bottles.  
 **A garden** is there to give you pleasure, not to be a constant worry.

C

Some nouns can be used uncountably when we talk about the whole substance or idea, but countably when we talk about an instance or more than one instance of it. When these nouns are used countably we can use **a/an** (and plurals). Compare:

- I don't drink **coffee**. *and*  Would you like **a coffee**? (= a cup of coffee)  
 She's got blonde **hair**. *and*  There's **a hair** in my soup!  
 He shook with **fear**. *and*  He has **a fear** of heights.

There are many other nouns like this, including **conversation, grammar, importance, iron, pleasure, shampoo, sound**. (For more see GR:H2 & H3.) Some of these nouns (e.g. **grammar, iron**) have different meanings when they are used countably and uncountably (see GR:H3).

- 45.1 Choose one of the following words to complete these sentences. Use the same word in each pair. Add the *a/an* in an appropriate place. (A)
- beach    future    past    world
- I think the best Australian wine is as good as any in .....
    - As a child, Ethel would often daydream about travelling forward in time to ..... very different from the one she lived in.
  - If we are elected, we will build our policies on the simple belief that our purpose is to create bright ..... for our children rather than achieving short-term goals for ourselves.
    - Although our current financial position is worrying, we have many new orders for our products and ..... is bright.
  - As I get older, I seem to remember ..... better than things that happened very recently.
    - At the age of 98, Johnson has ..... that goes back to the start of the last century.
  - If you want to get away from it all, you can take a small boat to deserted ..... on one of the islands.
    - Dear Mum and Dad, We're having a great holiday. The weather's wonderful and we're spending most of our time on .....
- 45.2 Underline the correct or more likely answer. If both answers are possible, underline them both. (B)
- We get some strange requests in our shop. We had *the customer/ a customer* in the other day who wanted to buy chocolate-covered ants.
  - It sometimes seems that *the individual/ an individual* can have little impact on the decisions that governments take.
  - The invention of *a car/ the car* is normally attributed to the German engineer Gottlieb Daimler.
  - The television/ A television* has changed the way we obtain information more than any other modern invention.
  - The campaign against smoking in public places argues that its harmful effects are not confined to *the smoker/ a smoker*.
- 45.3 Use each of these nouns twice to complete the sentences. Where necessary, add *a/an* at an appropriate place in the sentence. (C)
- conversation    grammar    importance    iron    pleasure    shampoo    sound
- My sisters were clearly having <sup>a</sup> serious *conversation* so I didn't like to disturb them.
  - It now gives me great ..... to introduce that marvellous ventriloquist, Marco Lutman.
  - The Nile is of critical ..... to the social and economic life of Egypt.
  - As we walked through the jungle we heard ..... we weren't expecting – the ring of a mobile phone.
  - The failure to teach ..... in schools has caused an overall decline in people's ability to write well.
  - Most red meat is relatively high in .....
  - Within a day of washing my hair it starts to feel greasy. I have yet to find ..... to solve this problem.
  - ..... travels at different speeds, depending on the temperature of the air.
  - I got ..... in my eye this morning in the shower and it's made it really sore.
  - It's real ..... to travel by rail in Sweden. The trains are clean and punctual.
  - I have ..... of English printed in 1890 on very thin paper.
  - Because the central government has relocated there, the town of Paraga has taken on ..... out of all proportion to its size.
  - Although he's got ..... he never seems to use it. His shirts are always creased.
  - As she walked into the party, ..... ceased and everyone in the crowded room stared at her.

## A/an, the and zero article (2)

A

We use **a/an** to say what a person's job is, was, or will be:

- She was a **company director** when she retired.
- Against her parents' wishes, she wants to be a **journalist**.

However, when we give a person's job title, or their unique position, we use **the** or **zero article** (i.e. no article), not **a/an**. Compare:

- She's been appointed **(the) head of the company**. *and*
- I'm a **production manager** at Fino. (= there may be more than one production manager)

After **the position of**, **the post of**, or **the role of** we use **zero article** before a job title:

- Dr Simons has taken on **the position of** Head of Department.

B

We usually use **zero article** (i.e. no article) before the name of an individual person or place. However, we use **the** –

- ☆ when there are two people with the same name and we want to specify which one we are talking about:
  - That's not **the Stephen Fraser** I went to school with.
  - but compare 'There was a Stephen Fraser in my class.' (= a person named Stephen Fraser)
- ☆ when we want to emphasise that the person we are referring to is the most famous person with that name. Used this way, **the** is stressed and pronounced /ði:/:
  - Do they mean **the Ronald Reagan**, or someone else?
- ☆ with an adjective to describe a person, or another noun which tells us their job:
  - the late Buddy Holly**
  - the artist William Turner**
- ☆ when we talk about a family as a whole:
  - The Robinsons** are away this weekend.

C

Notice that **a/an**, or sometimes **zero article**, is used with a name when referring to the particular excellent qualities of the person named:

- Jane plays tennis well, but she'll never be **(a) Steffi Graf**.

We also use **a/an** when we refer to an individual example of a product made by a particular manufacturer (e.g. I've just bought a Mercedes) or a work by a particular artist (e.g. Do you think it could be a Van Gogh/a Rembrandt?).

You can use **a/an** before a person's name if you don't know the person yourself. Compare:

- Dr Perch is here for you. (= I know Dr Perch) *and*
- There's a Dr Kenneth Perch on the phone. (= I haven't heard of him before) Do you want to talk to him?

D

In stories and jokes in conversation, **this** is commonly used instead of **a/an** to introduce a new person or thing. Using **this** highlights the person or thing as the topic of what is to come next:

- As I was walking along, **this** spider (= 'a spider') landed on my head, and...
- This** man (= 'a man') goes into a chemist and he says...

E

We use **the** before a *superlative adjective* (**the biggest**, **the most expensive**, etc.) when the superlative adjective is followed by a noun or defining phrase:

- He is **the finest young player** around at the moment.

However, we can often leave out **the**, particularly in an informal style, when there is no noun or defining phrase after the superlative adjective. Compare:

- A: Why did you decide to stay in this hotel?
- B: It was **(the) cheapest**. *and* It was **the cheapest** I could find.

## 46.1 Put a/an, the or zero article (-) in the spaces. Give all possible answers. (A-C)

- 1 A special award was given to ..... novelist Ian McMurphy.
- 2 I've been offered the position of ..... Director of Personnel.
- 3 I've always wanted to meet ..... Michael Owen.
- 4 'What make is your computer?' 'It's ..... Mac.'
- 5 I'm ..... marketing adviser at Unifleet.
- 6 Let me introduce you to ..... Paula Cox.
- 7 We met our good friend ..... Jean Wools when we were in ..... Plymouth.
- 8 I found myself talking to ..... George Bush! Not ..... George Bush, of course, but someone with the same name.
- 9 Brian's ..... manager of the local football team.
- 10 I didn't even know Joan was interested in art until I heard that she owns ..... Van Gogh.
- 11 When Jennie was young she knew ..... Picasso.
- 12 She was determined to be ..... author.
- 13 He has been appointed ..... Minister for Industry.
- 14 She recently became ..... minister in the new government.
- 15 We're going on holiday with ..... Smiths.
- 16 He's really keen on playing football. He likes to think of himself as ..... Ronaldo.
- 17 ..... Linda Green is outside. Do you want to see her?

## 46.2 If the underlined the can be left out of these sentences, put brackets around it. (E)

- 1 It's the best ice-cream I've ever tasted.
- 2 Jack's boat wasn't the most elegant in the harbour, but it was certainly the biggest.
- 3 I thought the second competitor was the best, even though he didn't win a prize.
- 4 This is by far the most valuable painting in the collection.
- 5 'Why did you ask Jim to go first?' 'Because he's the oldest.'
- 6 Sapphires occur in a variety of colours, but blue ones are the most valuable.
- 7 The Pacific is the biggest ocean in the world.
- 8 It's supposed to be the oldest post office in the country.

## 46.3 Complete the text with a/an, the, zero article or this. Give alternatives where possible. (Units 45 &amp; 46)

Send Now Send Later Save as Draft Add Attachments Signature Options Rewrap

Something very strange happened to me the other night. As I was going home  
 (1) ..... man came up to me. He had (2) ..... untidy hair and  
 (3) ..... paint all over his clothes. He told me that he was (4) .....  
 head of the local council and that he was offering me a job as (5) ..... road  
 sweeper. He said that (6) ..... road sweeper earns a great deal of money  
 and that I would have (7) ..... responsibility for miles of roads. Well, I just  
 said 'No thanks' and walked on. When I looked back he had stopped  
 (8) ..... woman. He was telling her that he was (9) ..... President  
 of the United States and that he wanted her to be (10) ..... Defence  
 Secretary...

## A/an, the and zero article (3)

A

With plural and uncountable nouns, **zero article** (i.e. no article) is used to talk generally, without definite people or things in mind. **The** is used when we assume the listener or reader will understand who or what we are referring to, or when other words in the noun phrase make the reference specific. Compare:

- The government has promised not to tax **books**. (= books generally) *and*
- The books** have arrived. (= the books you ordered)
- Music** played an important part in his life. (= music generally) *and*
- I thought **the music** used in the film was the best part. (= this particular music)

B

We often use **zero article** with the names of holidays, special times of the year, months, and days of the week including **Easter, Ramadan, New Year's Day**. But compare:

- I'll see you on **Saturday**. (= next Saturday)     We met on **Saturday**. (= last Saturday)
- They arrived on **a Saturday** as far as I can remember. (we are only interested in the day of the week, not which particular Saturday)
- They arrived on **the Saturday** after my birthday. (a particular Saturday, specifying which one)

With **winter, summer, spring, autumn**, and **New Year** (meaning the holiday period), we can use either **zero article** or **the**:

- In **(the) summer** I try to spend as much time as I can in the garden.

We use **the** when it is understood or we go on to specify which summer, spring, etc. we mean:

- I'd like to go skiing in **the autumn**. (= this year)     I first went skiing in **the spring** of 1992.

We say 'in the New Year' to mean near the beginning of next year:

- I'll see you again in **the New Year**.

When we want to describe the features of a particular holiday, season, or other period of time and say that it was somehow special when compared with others, we can use **It/That was... + a/an + noun + modifying phrase**. Compare:

- That was **a winter** I'll never forget. (= compared to other winters it was unforgettable) *and*
- That was **the winter** we went to Norway. (= a statement about a particular winter)

C

We use **zero article** with times of the day and night such as **midnight, midday, and noon**:

- If possible, I'd like it finished by **midday**.     **Midnight** couldn't come quickly enough.

But notice that we can say either **the dawn** or **dawn**:

- He got back into bed and waited for **(the) dawn**.

We use **the + morning/afternoon/evening** for a day which is understood or already specified:

- I enjoyed **the morning**, but in **the afternoon** the course was boring. But compare:
- Morning** is the time I work best. (= mornings in general; **The morning...** is also possible)
- I'll be there by **(the) morning/evening**. (*but ...by the afternoon, not ...by afternoon*)
- I waited **all morning**. (*more usual than all the morning/afternoon, etc.*)
- 'You look upset.' 'Yes, I've had a terrible **morning**.' (= compared to other mornings)

D

We use **by + zero article** to talk about means of transport and communication, including **go/travel by car/taxi/bus/plane/train/air/sea; contact/communicate by post/email/phone**.

Compare:

- I generally go **by bus** to work.    *and*     I generally take **the bus** to work.

E

We often use **zero article** in patterns where repeated or related words are joined by a preposition and used with a general meaning:

- The government makes grants according to criteria that differ from **region to region**.

Other examples include **person to person, back to back, end to end, face to face, side by side, start to finish, day by day, put pen to paper**.

- 47.1 Complete these sentences using one of these words. Use the where necessary. Use the *same* word in both (a) and (b) in each pair. (A)
- agriculture    children    fire    holidays    islands    money    parents    rain
- 1 a ..... as young as ten are working in the clothing industry.
  - b While you're painting the sitting room, I'll take ..... over to the park.
  - 2 a As the soil quality deteriorated, so too did ..... on which the region depended.
  - b Around 60% of the labour force in the county is supported by .....
  - 3 a Around the world ..... are being threatened by rising sea levels.
  - b ..... off the east coast of Malaysia are beautiful.
  - 4 a I've been really busy at work, so I'm really looking forward to .....
  - b ..... in the Brazilian rainforests are now becoming popular with adventurous travellers.
  - 5 a Farmers will be hoping for ..... in the next few weeks.
  - b Last night ..... was torrential.
  - 6 a I've left ..... I owe you on your desk.
  - b It is said that ..... is the root of all evil.
  - 7 a Using the new software, ..... will be able to monitor their children's use of the Internet.
  - b ..... of Paul Thomas claimed that he was at home at the time of the robbery.
  - 8 a It isn't known how ..... started.
  - b Animals fear ..... more than anything else.
- 47.2 Write *a/an*, the *or zero article* (-), whichever is more likely, in the spaces in these sentences. Where more than one answer is possible, consider any difference in meaning. (B, C & D)
- 1 a Do you remember when Mark and Julie came over and had that terrible row? That was ..... day I wouldn't want to go through again.
  - b I couldn't go to Jane's party. It was ..... day I was babysitting for Derek and Linda.
  - 2 a 'Shall we go out walking on ..... Sunday?' 'No, I'm busy this weekend.'
  - b I know the meeting will be on ..... Sunday in June, but I don't know the exact date yet.
  - 3 a Are you talking about ..... Christmas we spent in Sweden?
  - b I'll see you again after ..... Christmas.
  - 4 a The exam results will be sent by ..... post on 24<sup>th</sup> August.
  - b The application forms came in ..... post this morning.
  - 5 a I'd been working in the garden all ..... afternoon and my back ached.
  - b I've spent ..... afternoon on the phone to my mother.
  - 6 a That old coat of yours won't be warm enough for ..... winter.
  - b 'I haven't seen Jack for months.' 'He's been away in South Africa for ..... winter.'
  - 7 a The early train to Cambridge was cancelled so I had to go by ..... car.
  - b It's raining so I think I'll take ..... car.
- 47.3 Complete the sentences using one of the phrases in E. (E)
- 1 They sat ..... on the bench looking out over the countryside.
  - 2 She was in hospital for several weeks, but ..... her health improved.
  - 3 Tiger Woods is celebrating ..... victories in his last three golf tournaments.
  - 4 The island is so small you can walk from ..... in about an hour.
  - 5 The disease is easily spread from .....

## Some and any

## Some

**A** Before plural and uncountable nouns we sometimes use **some** or **zero article** (i.e. no article) with very little difference in meaning:

- 'Where were you last week?' 'I was visiting **(some)** friends.'
- Before serving, pour **(some)** yoghurt over the top.

With both **some** and **zero article** we are referring to particular people or things but in an indefinite way. When it is used in this way, **some** is usually pronounced /səm/.

We don't use **some** to make general statements about whole classes of things or people (GR:18 & 19):

- Furniture** can be an expensive item when you buy your first home.
- Babies** need lots of care and attention.

**B** **Some** is used before a number to mean 'approximately':

- Some** eighty per cent of all residents took part in the vote. (= approximately eighty per cent; beginning 'Eighty per cent...' suggests a more precise figure)

When it is used in this way, **some** is usually pronounced /sʌm/.

**C** When we can't say exactly which person or thing we are talking about because we don't know, can't remember, or want to emphasise that it is not important, we can use **some** instead of **a/an** with a singular noun. When it is used in this way, **some** is usually pronounced /sʌm/.

- He was interrupted twice by **some** troublemaker in the audience.

We use the phrase **some(thing)** or **other** in a similar way:

- I bought them from **some** shop or **other** in New Street. (*not ...from a shop or other...*)

## Any

**D** We usually use **any** not **some** (and **anyone**, **anything**, etc. not **someone**, **something**, etc.) –

- ☆ in non-affirmative contexts; that is, lacking positive, affirmative meaning.
- ☆ to refer to non-specific, unspecified things.

For example, we generally use **any** in sentences with a negative meaning when they include negative adverbs such as **barely**, **hardly**, **never**, **rarely**, **scarcely**, **seldom**; negative verbs such as **deny**, **fail**, **forbid**, **prevent**, **prohibit**, **refuse**; negative adjectives such as **impossible**, **reluctant**, **unable**, **unlikely**; and the preposition **without**:

- There's **hardly any** sugar left. We must get some when we go shopping.
- I boarded up the windows to **prevent any** damage during the storm.
- It was **impossible** to see **anything** in the dark.
- We didn't have tickets, but we got into the stadium **without any** difficulty.

However, we use **some** with these negative words–

- ☆ when **some** (pronounced /sʌm/) has the implication 'not all' (see I13):
  - We were able to **prevent some** damage to the house. (= but not all of it)
  - I talk to colleagues **before** I take **some** decisions, but this one I had to decide on my own.
- ☆ when the basic meaning is positive:
  - Somebody** isn't telling the truth. (= There is some person (who isn't telling the truth))
- ☆ when we are talking about a particular but unspecified person or thing:
  - I was **reluctant** to repeat **something** so critical of Paul. (= a specific criticism)

**E** We often use **any** in clauses that begin with **before**, and with comparisons:

- I cleared up the mess **before anyone** saw it. ('...before someone saw it' suggests that I have a particular person in mind who might see it)
- She has as good a chance **as anybody** of winning the race.
- The material felt **softer than anything** she had ever touched before.

- 48.1 Complete the sentences with **some** or **zero article** (-). If both **some** and **zero article** are possible with little difference in meaning, write (**some**). (A & GR 110-114)
- 1 There have been ..... allegations of corruption in the government.
  - 2 If you're going to the library, could you take back ..... books that I've finished reading?
  - 3 The price of ..... coffee is at an all-time low.
  - 4 The door kept flying open in the wind so I tied it up with ..... string.
  - 5 I'm going into town to buy ..... clothes.
  - 6 Tony knows more about ..... jazz than anyone I've every met.
  - 7 It costs much more to make ..... films today than 10 years ago.
  - 8 I need to get ..... bread from the supermarket.
- 48.2 Rewrite these newspaper headlines in your own words using **some** to mean 'approximately'. The first is done for you. (B)
- 1 **250 people charged with assault following Molton riots**  
*Some 250 people have been charged with assault following the Molton riots.*
  - 2 **30% OF ALL CITY BUSES FOUND TO BE UNSAFE**
  - 3 **Unexploded bomb found 5 miles from Newham centre**
  - 4 **25% OF ELECTRICITY FROM WIND BY 2020**
  - 5 **200 jobs to be lost at Encon steel works**
- 48.3 Complete the sentences in any appropriate way using **some + singular noun** or **some + singular noun + or other**. The first is done for you. (C)
- 1 I don't know where I got the information from. I must have heard it *on some radio programme (or other).*
  - 2 I don't know where Richard is. He's probably .....
  - 3 I don't know where the book is. Maybe I lent it .....
  - 4 I don't know where Maggie works. I think it's in .....
  - 5 I don't know why Ken is still at work. Perhaps he's got to .....
- 48.4 Complete these sentences with **some, someone, something, any, anyone** or **anything**. Where both **some(one/thing)** or **any(one/thing)** are possible, write them both and consider any difference in meaning. (D & E)
- 1 John worked hard at learning Japanese but failed to make ..... real progress.
  - 2 I was unable to eat ..... of the food.
  - 3 I always offer to help organise school concerts, but there is seldom ..... for me to do.
  - 4 Janet Jones is ..... I rarely see these days.
  - 5 He denied that he had done ..... wrong.
  - 6 I always get to work before ..... else.
  - 7 The theatre is unlikely to have ..... tickets left for tonight's performance.
  - 8 Despite rowing as hard as we could, we had progressed barely ..... distance from the shore.
  - 9 ..... parents never seem to have time to sit down and talk to their children.
  - 10 The regulations of the game forbid ..... ball to rise above shoulder height.
  - 11 When I last lent my laptop to a friend it came back damaged, so I'm reluctant to lend it to ..... else.
  - 12 She valued friendship more than ..... in the world.