ENGLISH GRAMMAR · DEEP DIVE

Mastering English Articles

How to choose between a, an, the and no article at all: by sound, by what the listener already knows, and by whether you mean something general or something specific.

A2 grammar articles

1 · General?

A whole class, an uncountable thing, a meal, sport, language or name?

no article

Cars are expensive. I had breakfast at seven.

2 · Known?

Can the listener tell exactly which one you mean?

the

The sun is bright. I saw a dog. The dog was barking.

3 · New and single?

One countable thing, mentioned for the first time?

a / an

Choose by the first sound: a doctor, an apple.

ARTICLE	WHEN	EXAMPLE
a	before a consonant sound, one new countable noun	She bought a new umbrella.
an	before a vowel sound, one new countable noun	He is an engineer in London.
the	the listener knows which one; unique things; superlatives	This is the most important rule.
—	plural or uncountable nouns in general; meals, sports, languages	Water is important for health.

1 A or an? Listen to the first sound

Write a or an. Say each word aloud first: the spelling can trick you.

1 ____ umbrella

2 ____ hour

3 ____ university

4 ____ European city

5 ____ honest answer

6 ____ MP3 player

7 ____ one-way ticket

8 ____ engineer

9 ____ useful idea

10 ____ X-ray

2 a, an, the or nothing?

Fill each gap with a, an, the, or — when no article is needed.

1 I saw _____ cat in the garden. _____ cat was black and white.

2 _____ sun rises in the east.

3 She speaks _____ French and German.

4 We had _____ lunch at one o'clock.

5 This is _____ best film I've seen this year.

6 Can you close _____ window, please? It's cold.

7 My brother is _____ architect.

8 _____ coffee keeps me awake at night.

9 They live in a flat near _____ Thames.

10 He goes to _____ work by train.

11 I need _____ new phone; mine is broken.

12 _____ Netherlands is famous for its flowers.

3 Spot the mistake

Each sentence has one article mistake. Write the correct sentence on the line.

1 She is an university student.

2 I'll be back in a hour.

3 We play the tennis on Saturdays.

4 The money can't buy happiness.

5 He travelled to the Spain last year.

6 Moon is very bright tonight.

Remember an hour (silent h) but a university (it starts with a /j/ sound, like you). The letter does not decide; the sound does.

4 A short story

Complete the story with a, an, the or —. Watch for the second mention.

My sister works as [1] _____ nurse. Every morning she goes to [2] _____ work by bike. Yesterday she found [3] _____ old wallet in [4] _____ park near our flat. [5] _____ wallet had no money in it, only [6] _____ photo of a dog. She took it to [7] _____ police station, because [8] _____ honesty matters to her.

5 Sort them

Which names take the, and which take no article? Write each one in the right box.

breakfast · Alps · Japan · Atlantic · maths · basketball · United States · Mount Everest

the …	no article

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✓ Where are the answers?

The answers, with an explanation for each one, are in the LinguaBite app. Open this Deep Dive and scroll to Downloads at the bottom of the article: once you have downloaded this worksheet, its answers appear there after a couple of days, so you do the exercises first. You can choose 1, 2 or 3 days in the app's Settings.