

ARTICLES

Use this sheet to help you:

- avoid dropping articles in your written work
- learn when to use a, an, the, or no article in your written work

5 minute self test

Add a, an, the, or indicate no article (-) to the following sentences:

1. I have ___ Finance tute in ten minutes in ___ Babel Building.
2. I usually come to ___ uni by ___ tram.
3. ___ university should not only be for ___ rich.
4. I read ___ good article yesterday. ___ article could be useful for my essay.
5. ___ life is not always easy for ___ undergraduates with ___ part-time jobs.
6. ___ postgrad students can be more talkative in tutes than ___ undergraduates.
7. ___ people think highly of ___ University of Melbourne.
8. I need to buy ___ milk, ___ Age, ___apple and ___loaf of bread.
9. Later this year, I'm travelling to ___ USA and ___ England.
10. ___ financial viability of ___ venture is questionable.

Check your answers on Page 5

Introduction

Using articles can be difficult. Many languages don't feature articles, and in English, rules for their use are complex. You may continue to drop or misuse articles for years. This sheet, however, will help your ability to understand and use this tricky area of the English language.

Articles: overview

The

"The" (the definite article) is mostly used with singular and plural countable and uncountable nouns to refer to specific (or definite) things.

A / an

"A / an" (the indefinite article) is used to refer to singular countable nouns in a general (indefinite) sense, that is, where we are not talking about a specific thing, or when we first refer to something. Contrast:

- the company (that company in particular)
a company (companies in general, any one)
- the CEO (a particular person)
a CEO (any one, unspecified)
- A man is waiting. (first mention)
The man wants to see you. (second mention)

No article

No article (the zero article) is used when we refer to uncountable nouns and plural nouns in a general sense. Contrast:

- Business isn't supportive of the policy. (business in a general sense)
The business isn't supportive of the policy. (a specific business)
- Diamonds are a scarce resource. (diamonds in a general sense)
The diamonds are missing. (specific diamonds)

	A/an	The	No article
Singular countable	<i>A company</i>	<i>The company</i>	
Plural countable		<i>The companies</i>	<i>Companies</i>
Uncountable		<i>The liquidity</i>	<i>Liquidity</i>

(Adapted from Swan, 1992, p. 66.)

Articles: further rules and tips

A / an: main uses

Any one of a kind (not a specific one)

I need an extension.

A thing that is described in a general sense

A leader's role is arguably different from a manager's.

A thing mentioned for the first time

I bought a book on Microeconomics yesterday. The book looks very useful.

Units of quantity / measurement

A few, a pair, a majority \$100 an hour, 3 days a week, 60 beats a minute

A or an?

A is used before consonant sounds (a bank, a unit)

An is used before vowel sounds (an audio cassette, an MP3 player)

Note that the pronunciation of the word the article follows determines whether a or an is used, not the spelling. (See the examples above)

The: main uses

The is used for things that are specific because they are:

1. Known by the speaker / listener

The report got an HD.

2. The only one (or the only one that is relevant in the context)

The sun, the floating of the dollar, the Reserve Bank

3. Mentioned previously

I was granted an extension. The extension gave me time to improve my work.

The is also used before:

Some collective nouns which refer to a group:

The law, the Government, the business community

Some adjectives which are used as nouns to refer to a group

The elderly, the rich, the unemployed

Superlatives

The biggest, the most important

Ordinal numbers

The first, the second

Island groups, oceans, seas, mountain ranges, rivers, geographical regions
The West Indies, The Pacific Ocean, The Japan Sea, The Snowy Mountains, The Middle East

Nationalities which cannot be made plural by using 's'
The French, the Japanese, the English

No article: main uses

Things referred to in a general sense.

Mergers can be good for the health of a company. Colleagues have to be careful not to annoy others when at work. Friendship can occur in the workplace

Proper nouns (eg. names of people, towns and most countries)
Bruce comes from Adelaide. I have been to China. I went to Uluru last week.

(Exceptions: The People's Republic of China, The Philippines, The Maldives, The United States of America. Note the very common error of leaving out the article for The USA, The UK, etc.)

The following types of nouns:

- abstract - Time is short.
- games - I play tennis.
- meals - Have you had lunch?
- languages - She speaks Cantonese.
- subjects - We study Economics.
- types of music - I like classical music and jazz.
- transport - I come by tram, by foot, by train or by car.

Some common prepositional phrases
to school, in hospital, in bed, at sea, at work, at night, at home

Situations where the noun has been mentioned before in the text (often replaced by a pronoun instead of article + noun)

The company was deficient in not providing accurate annual reports to its shareholders. It did not inform ... (no need for an article and noun here as the pronoun has taken its place).

Using articles to refer to things in a general sense: further rules and tips

Countable nouns

The customer is always right. (the class or set as a whole)

Customers are necessary for all successful businesses. (no article needed here)

A customer is needed for the product to sell. (any member of the class or set)

However, note:

The customer is always right (the class or set as a whole)

Not: A customer is always right (this would mean only one member of the class).

Uncountable nouns

No article is needed in these cases.

Liquidity is a great advantage of share investment.

Shareholdings in the company rose quickly.

However, note:

The liquidity of the company is poor.

(Here you are using "liquidity" to mean a specific thing, i.e., this specific example relevant to this particular company.)

However, use "the" if the noun used in the general sense is followed by an "of" phrase.

Economic history can be called the history of economics

Shareholder behaviour = the behaviour of shareholders

Computer use = the use of computers

For concrete uncountable nouns and plural nouns the rules are not so strict:

Activity: add articles or no articles (-) as required.

_____ company was deficient in not providing accurate annual reports to its shareholders.

_____ company did not inform them that _____ meeting about the falling share prices was to be held on _____ seventh floor of _____ Babel Building at _____ University of Melbourne.

_____ shares were falling rapidly. They had fallen from between 9 and 30 percent over _____ just two days. _____ falls of this kind are unacceptable to any _____ company and _____ shareholder.

_____ shareholders from different countries were coming to _____ meeting. _____ shareholders from _____ United States, _____ France, _____ Great Britain, and _____ Germany were especially interested in coming. _____ follow-up meeting was also scheduled for _____ week following _____ release of _____ proposed draft Company Report. This meeting, of course, did not eventuate because _____ company report was not distributed.

_____ company even boasted that it would provide _____ wine and _____ caviar for the assembled shareholders. _____ wine was to be a top quality wine served in _____ chilled glasses and _____ caviar was to be _____ famous brand from _____ eastern part of _____ Russia.

(Adapted from an unpublished paper by Marion Howes, 1992, p. 66.)

Answers

5 minute self test

1. a, the,
2. -, -,
3. -, the,
4. a, the,
5. -, -, -,
6. -, -,
7. -, the,
8. -, The, an, a
9. The, -,
10. The, the

Activity

The company was deficient in not providing accurate annual reports to its shareholders. **The** company did not inform them that a meeting about the falling share prices was to be held on **the** seventh floor of the Babel Building at the University of Melbourne.

The shares were falling rapidly. They had fallen from between 9 and 30 percent over just two days. Falls of this kind are unacceptable to any company and shareholder.

Shareholders from different countries were coming to the meeting. **The** shareholders from **the** United States, France, Great Britain, and Germany were especially interested in coming. **A** follow-up meeting was also scheduled for **the** week following **the** release of a proposed draft Company Report. This meeting, of course, did not eventuate because **the** company report was not distributed.

The company even boasted that it would provide wine and caviar for the assembled shareholders. **The** wine was to be **a** top quality wine served in chilled glasses and **the** caviar was to be **a** famous brand from **the** eastern part of Russia.

References

Swan, M. (1992). *Practical English Usage*, Oxford, U.K: Oxford University Press