

Definite, indefinite and zero articles

Introduction



Mary is **a** scientist. She studied **Ø** biology at **the** University of Manchester.

Definition

We use articles before nouns to help define them.

Indefinite article: **a** or **an**

I have **a** banana and **an** orange.

Definite article: **the**

The meal we had last night was delicious.

Zero article: Neither **a/an** nor **the**

People often drink **Ø** coffee after **Ø** dinner.

Note that

Sometimes an article is not necessary but we always need one with a singular countable noun.

| Singular countable nouns | Plural countable nouns | Uncountable nouns |
|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|

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|--|---|---|---|
| a - for nouns that begin with a consonant |  |  |  |
| an - for nouns that begin with a vowel |  |  |  |
| the |  |  |  |
| zero article |  |  |  |

Indefinite article

a is used:

- before consonants: **a** doctor, **a** mechanic, **a** dog, **a** big car, **a** happy person
- before vowels that sound like the consonant /j/: **a** university, **a** European person

an is used:

- before vowels: **an** architect, **an** umbrella, **an** easy exercise, **an** important meeting
- before 'h' when it is silent: **an** hour, **an** honourable person
- before consonants that sound like vowels: **an** FBI agent, **an** SNCF employee

| Rules for 'a/an' | Examples |
|----------------------------------|--|
| To define something | Tennis is a sport. Manchester is a city in England. |
| To describe someone or something | She's a lovely person. He's an optimist. It's a lovely day today. |
| To talk about jobs | He's a lawyer and his wife is an electrician. |

When we mention something or someone for the first time

I have **a** dog and **a** cat.
There's **an** angry man in reception!
She has **a** new car.

When we mean one of many - it doesn't matter or we don't know which one

Can you open **a** window, please?
She works in **an** office.

Definite article

the is used before singular and plural countable nouns and before uncountable nouns.

| Rules for 'the' | Examples |
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| When we talk about something specific - we know which one(s) | What is the name of your company? Here are the parts that you ordered. The children are on holiday this week. |
| When we talk about something previously mentioned | We have a cat and a dog. The cat is very old but the dog loves playing with the children. |
| When there is only one | Paris is the capital city of France. the sun the Queen of England |
| Countries which are plural or which include the kind of country in the name - kingdom, republic etc. | the UK the United States the Netherlands the Republic of Ireland |
| Plural names of places | the Alps the Maldives the Midlands |
| Regions and points on the globe | the Far East the Mid-West [U.S.] the North the North Pole Manchester is in the north-west of England. |

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| Geographical features: oceans, seas, rivers, forests, gulfs, peninsulas and deserts (but not lakes) | <p>the Pacific</p> <p>the Irish Sea</p> <p>the Rhone</p> <p>the Sahara</p> <p>the Black Forest</p> <p>the Gulf of Mexico</p> |
| When talking generally about the population of some countries | <p>The Spanish start work later and finish later than other Europeans.</p> <p>The Japanese are often quiet during meetings.</p> |
| As an alternative to the plural when discussing facts relating to animals or objects generally | <p>The elephant is found in Africa and Asia. [Elephants are...]</p> <p>The CD was invented in 1965. [CDs were...]</p> |
| And, similarly, when talking about musical instruments | <p>Do you play the piano?</p> <p>I love listening to the violin.</p> |
| Buildings | <p>the National Gallery</p> <p>the Louvre</p> <p>the Ritz Hotel</p> |
| Some organisations and institutions | <p>the police</p> <p>the Army, the Navy, the Royal Air Force</p> <p>the BBC</p> <p>the Internet</p> |
| Some expressions relating to position or time | <p>on the top</p> <p>in the middle</p> <p>at the bottom</p> <p>on the left/right</p> <p>at the moment</p> <p>in the end</p> <p>at the beginning</p> <p>at the weekend</p> <p>in the morning/afternoon/evening</p> |
| With 'same' | <p>It's the same as this one.</p> |

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| With some adjectives to refer to a group of people | the poor = poor people generally the rich the young the homeless |
| Before superlative adjectives and adverbs | the biggest the most beautiful the least expensive the best/worst the most carefully |
| Before some adjectives, often in promotional literature | the necessary = what is necessary Have a look at these recommendations and do the necessary. |
| Before some adjectives to make a noun [only in literary or poetic language or in certain expressions] | the deep = the sea the blue = the sky It was like a bolt from the blue = It came as a complete surprise to me. |

Zero article

We don't always need to use **a/an** or **the** before a noun. We sometimes call this zero article or you may see it as **Ø**.

| Rules for zero article | Examples | Exceptions |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| All continents and most countries | Ø Japan is in Ø Asia and has more than 6,000 islands. The north coast of Ø France faces the south coast of Ø England. | Names of countries which include republic, kingdom etc. or plurals: the Czech Republic the UK the Philippines the Netherlands |

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| Islands | Ø Ibiza, Ø Corsica and Ø Sicily are all islands in the Mediterranean. | Names which include the word isle(s) or plurals: the Channel Islands the Isle of Wight the Scilly Isles |
| Cities and towns | Ø Birmingham is the second largest city in England. | the Hague |
| Mountains & lakes | Ø Lake Gwynant is 3km from Ø Mount Snowdon in North Wales. | When we don't include 'Mount': the Matterhorn the Jungfrau Groups of lakes: the Great Lakes |
| Names of streets | Ø Oxford Street in London has 548 shops. | the High Street [Street signs usually show High Street but we always say the High Street.] |
| Names of shops | Ø Sainsbury's is England's oldest supermarket and Ø Tesco is the biggest. | A particular shop: The Sainsbury's in the High Street is open on Sundays. |
| Languages | Swiss people speak Ø German, Ø French, Ø Italian or Ø Romansh. | Sometimes, instead of 'English', (or any other language) we say: The English <u>language</u> is spoken as a native or foreign language by about 900 million people. The meaning is the same but this is more formal. |

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| <p>Places such as school, prison, hospital, church etc. when we think of them generally, not as specific buildings</p> | <p>Christians go to Ø church on Sundays.</p> <p>My son's going to Ø university in September and my daughter left Ø college last year - she's at Ø work now.</p> <p>He takes his children to Ø school every morning.</p> <p>She's in Ø hospital. [staying as a patient for more than a day]</p> <p>We took him to Ø hospital when he broke his leg.</p> <p>He's in Ø prison. He went to Ø prison 5 years ago for murder.</p> | <p>'The church' means the Christian Church as an institution, not a place.</p> <p>the synagogue, the temple, the mosque, etc.</p> <p>Compare:</p> <p>She works in a hospital. [It doesn't matter which one.]</p> <p>I went to the hospital yesterday. [as a visitor - and we know which one.]</p> |
| <p>Names of stations, airports etc.</p> | <p>You can get a train to Ø Gatwick Airport from Ø Victoria Station.</p> | |
| <p>Sport and education</p> | <p>I like playing Ø golf at the weekend.</p> <p>She's studying Ø archaeology at Manchester University.</p> | |
| <p>Generalisations - uncountable and plural countable nouns only</p> | <p>I love Ø coffee but I don't like Ø tea.</p> <p>He reads Ø magazines about Ø cars and Ø motorbikes.</p> <p>Ø Happiness is more important than Ø money.</p> | <p>Compare:</p> <p>I need a coffee but the coffee at work is horrible!</p> <p>She loves Ø music but she doesn't like the music her son listens to.</p> |

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| Meals | In Spain, they have Ø lunch and Ø dinner much later than in England. | Compare: We had a nice lunch yesterday. The lunch at the convention was terrible! |
| Other expressions | I go to Ø bed at 11.00 & on Sundays I stay in Ø bed until 10.00. I go to work by Ø bus or Ø train but never on Ø foot. It's on Ø page 36. They're on Ø holiday. | Compare: The dog's in the bed again! [talking about a specific bed] |
| Before 'next' and 'last' | I went to Japan Ø last year. [last = previous] I'll see her at the meeting Ø next month. | Louis Philippe was the last king of France. [last = final] The last time I went to London, it rained every day! [last = the most recent] I was there first and Jean was the next (person) to arrive. |

Examples



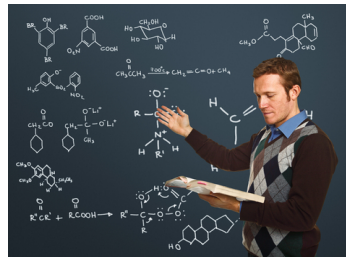
Can you open **a** window, please?



Can you close **the** window, please?



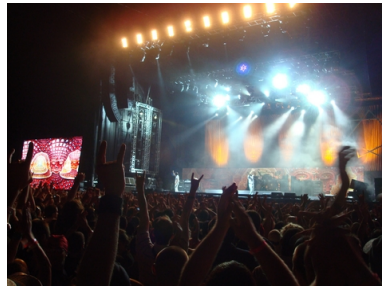
My daughter's at **Ø** university,
[she's a student] but she's on
Ø holiday at **the** moment with **a** friend.



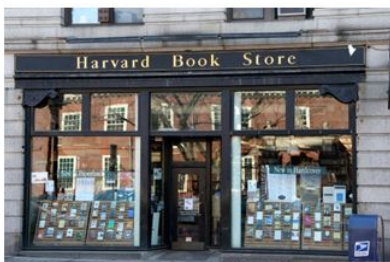
My husband works as **a** lecturer at **the**
university. [We know which one]



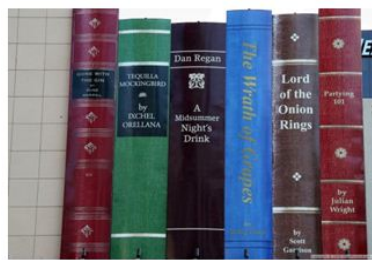
I love listening to **Ø** music...
music is too loud.



...but I don't like going to **Ø** concerts; the



I need to buy **a** book.



The book I am looking for is by J. Wright.



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