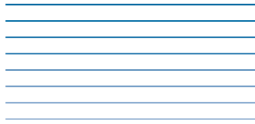


UNIT
2.5

Definite Articles



Students often find the rules for using articles ('a', 'an' and 'the') in English confusing. This unit focuses on the definite article, 'the', and provides guidelines, examples and practice.

1 Use of articles

Unless they are uncountable, all nouns need an article when used in the singular. The article can be either **a/an** or **the**. Compare:

- (a) *Research is an important activity in universities.*
- (b) *The research begun by Dr Mathews was continued by Professor Brankovic.*
- (c) *An interesting piece of research was conducted among 200 patients in the clinic.*

In (a), research, which is usually uncountable, is being used in a general sense.

In (b), a specific piece of research is identified, started by Dr Mathews.

In (c), the research is mentioned for the first time, and the word 'piece' is used to 'count' the research.

► See [Unit 2.12.3 Singular or plural? Uncountable nouns](#)

2 Using definite articles

The rules for using **the** (the definite article) are quite complex.

■ **Decide why it is used, or not used, in the following examples.**

- (a) The world's fastest animal is the cheetah.
- (b) The USA was founded in the eighteenth century.
- (c) The government increased taxation in the 1970s.
- (d) The French Revolution was partly caused by bad harvests.
- (e) The *New Scientist* is published every week.
- (f) The south is characterised by poverty and emigration.
- (g) Pablo Picasso, the Spanish artist, was born in Malaga.
- (h) The River Seine runs through the middle of Paris.
- (i) The United Nations was founded in 1945.
- (j) The euro was introduced in 2002.

In general, **the** is used with:

- (a) superlatives (*fastest*)
- (b) time periods (*eighteenth century, 1970s*)
- (c) unique things (*government, world*)
- (d) specified things (*French Revolution*)
- (e) regular publications (*New Scientist*)
- (f) regions and rivers (*south, River Seine*)
- (g) very well-known people and things (*Spanish artist*)
- (h) institutions and bodies (*United Nations*)
- (i) positions (*middle*)
- (j) currencies (*euro*)

It is **not** used with:

- (a) things in general (*bad harvests*)
- (b) names of countries (except for the UK, the USA and a few others)
- (c) abstract nouns (e.g. poverty, love)
- (d) companies/things named after people/places (e.g. Sainsbury's, Heathrow Airport)

Note the alternate forms:

The deserts of Australia are expanding.

Australia's deserts are expanding.

3 Practice A

Students often have problems deciding if a noun phrase is specific or not. Compare:

Climate change is a serious threat for many people. (not specific)

The Russian climate is characterised by long cold winters. (specific)

- In the following sentences, decide if the words and phrases in bold are specific or not, and whether 'the' should be added.

Example:

___ **inflation** was a serious problem for ___ **Brazilian government**.

*Inflation was a serious problem for **the** Brazilian government.*

- (a) ___ **engineering** is the main industry in ___ **northern region**.
- (b) ___ **insurance firms** have made record profits in ___ **last decade**.
- (c) ___ **global warming** is partly caused by ___ **fossil fuels**.
- (d) ___ **mayor** has been arrested on suspicion of ___ **corruption**.
- (e) ___ **moons of Jupiter** were discovered in ___ **eighteenth century**.
- (f) ___ **tourism** is ___ **world's** biggest industry.
- (g) ___ **forests of Scandinavia** produce most of ___ **Britain's** paper.
- (h) ___ **Thai currency** is ___ **baht**.
- (i) ___ **computer crime** has grown by 200 per cent in ___ **last five years**.
- (j) ___ **main causes** of ___ **Industrial Revolution** are still debated.
- (k) Already, 3 per cent of ___ **working population** are employed in ___ **call centres**.
- (l) ___ **latest forecast** predicts ___ **warmer winters** in ___ next two **years**.
- (m) Research on ___ **energy saving** is being conducted in ___ **Physics Faculty**.
- (n) ___ **best definition** is often ___ **simplest**.

4 Practice B

Note the difference in meaning between:

A professor of French (one of several/many)

The professor of French (the only one)

- Complete the following text by inserting a/an/the (or nothing) in each gap. (Note that in some cases, more than one answer is possible.)

The Origins of @

Giorio Stabile, a professor of (a) _____ history at La Sapienza University in Rome, has demonstrated that (b) _____ @ sign, now used in email addresses, was actually invented 500 years ago. Professor Stabile has shown that (c) _____ @, now (d) _____ symbol of (e) _____ Internet, was first used by (f) _____ Italian merchants during (g) _____ sixteenth century.

He claims that it originally represented (h) _____ unit of volume, based on (i) _____ large jars used to carry liquids in (j) _____ ancient Mediterranean world. He has found (k) _____ first example of its use in (l) _____ letter written in 1546 by (m) _____ merchant from Florence. (n) _____ letter, which was sent to Rome, announces (o) _____ arrival in Spain of (p) _____ ships carrying gold from (q) _____ South America.