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# GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

## Articles

### USING A AND AN

# EXPLANATION

- The use of **ARTICLES** (**a, an, the** and the **zero article**) is one of the most difficult areas of grammar.
- IELTS candidates who only make a small number of mistakes with **ARTICLES** when they speak and write often get a high grade for **GRAMMATICAL RANGE AND ACCURACY**.
- When you write or speak English, you have to make decisions about **ARTICLES** in nearly every sentence.
- We can use **a/an** with singular countable nouns. Knowing exactly when to use **a/an** is important.

# WHEN TO USE A/AN

When we want to refer to one thing (a singular countable noun) for the first time:

- Pollution is **a serious problem**.
- It would be good to buy **a new table** and **a wardrobe**.
- I come from **a really small town** which you've probably never heard of.
- **A scientist** working in **a laboratory** in Italy has discovered **a cure** for **a major tropical disease**.
- **A misunderstanding** between **a Mexican soldier** and **an Argentinian tourist** nearly caused **a war**, or at least **a major diplomatic incident**.

# WHEN TO USE A/AN

When we want to refer to one thing (singular countable noun), but it doesn't matter which one:

- You should bring **a bottle of water** and **a sandwich**.
- I thought I heard **a mouse** but it could have been **a bird**.
- I'm going to buy **a new computer** with **a large screen**.
- I'd love to live in **a huge house** with **a garden**, **an attic** and **a cellar**.
- If you ever need **a friend**, give me **a call**.
- This is the first line of **a joke**: **an Englishman**, **an Irishman** and **a Welshman** walked into **a restaurant**.

# WHEN TO USE A/AN

When there are many things but we only want to refer to one of these things:

- The issue of individuals throwing litter in our streets is **a serious problem**. However, there are many other serious problems which we need to deal with at the same time.
- Biology is undoubtedly **a fascinating course**, just like physics, chemistry, engineering and further mathematics.
- **A single person** planting **a single tree** will not solve the planet's problems. However, as **a symbolic act** it may carry weight.

# WHEN TO USE A/AN

In some phrases which describe quantity:

- **A large proportion/percentage of** youngsters who were surveyed said that they wanted a job as a TV personality, footballer or pop-star.
- **A significant number of** deaths are caused by poor air quality.
- **A lot of** part-time employees would like a full-time contract.
- **A large/significant amount of** money has been spent on advertising
- **A huge/enormous amount of** energy could be saved if people remembered to turn off the lights.
- **A great deal of** animosity is felt towards anyone who attacks or abuses a police officer.

# WHEN TO USE A/AN

- A **great many** older people feel discriminated against.
- A **few** workers are happy with their salaries.
- A **small/tiny/negligible amount of** time is lost each day when employees cannot get internet access.
- There is **an insignificant amount of** danger. The activity is virtually risk-free.
- A **small/tiny/negligible number of** employees have decided to go on strike.
- The table suggests that **an insignificant number of** Spanish tourists visited the region in 2002.



# WHEN TO USE A/AN

When there is only one example of a noun, or if it is completely clear which noun we mean, we usually use **the**. However, when we want to describe a particular example of a unique thing, we often use **a/an**:

- I love waking up to **a clear blue sky** and **a bright sun**. (There are other types of **sky**, such as **a dark sky**. There are other types of **sun**, such as **a low sun**)
- Nobody wants future generations to have to deal with **a climate which is entirely unpredictable**. (There are other types of **climate**, such as **a stable climate**)

# WHEN TO USE A/AN

- **A future with driverless cars** and many more automated processes seems very likely (There are other types of **future**, such as **a simpler future**)
- Having **an internet which children can safely use** should be a priority. (There are other types of **internet**, such as **a dangerous internet**)
- **A government which does not obey the law** is a dangerous thing. (There are other kinds of **government**, such as **a law-abiding government**, **a popular government** and **a competent government**)

# WHEN TO USE **A** AND WHEN TO USE **AN**

We use **a** before words starting with a sound made with tongue and/or lips

a university course

a US official

a year

a one-year course

a willingness to work

a historian

a hotel

a hectic day

We use **an** before words starting with an open sound

an umbrella

an EU official

an MP

an open door

an orchestra

an hour

an FBI agent

an SOS call

# WHEN TO USE A AND WHEN TO USE AN

The key difference is not the first letter of the following word. It is the first sound of the following word:

- Going to **an open-day** before actually applying to **a university** can be extremely useful.
- **A European** survey funded by **an EU** department has discovered that foreigners often visualise British people carrying **an umbrella**.
- It would be **an honour** to meet **an MP**, particularly **an honest** one.
- During **a one-week** holiday we only had **an hour** of sunshine.
- Members of **an orchestra** need to show **a willingness** to work hard.



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# GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

## Articles

### USING THE (PART 1)

# EXPLANATION

- The use of **ARTICLES** (**a, an, the** and the **zero article**) is one of the most difficult areas of grammar.
- IELTS candidates who only make a small number of mistakes with **ARTICLES** when they speak and write often get a high grade for **GRAMMATICAL RANGE AND ACCURACY**.
- When you write or speak English, you have to make decisions about **ARTICLES** in nearly every sentence.
- We often use **the** when the reader/listener knows exactly which noun we are writing/speaking about.



# WHEN TO USE THE

We can use **the** when the reader knows which thing we are writing/speaking about. Often this is because we are not writing/speaking about this thing for the first time:

- Experts have suggested a new law. **The law** would stop people drinking alcohol in public places. (The reader knows which **law** we are writing about. We are writing about the **new law**)
- A new theory which explains human aggression has been developed. **The theory** has some supporters but a lot of critics. (The reader knows which **theory** we are writing about. We are writing about the **new theory which explains human aggression**)

# WHEN TO USE THE

We can use **the** when the reader knows which thing we are writing/speaking about. Often this is because we are not writing/speaking about this thing for the first time:

- Teachers often use new approaches to help their students learn. However, **the results** of these strategies can be mixed. (The reader knows that we are writing about the **results of the new approaches**)
- I am furious that my bus didn't come this morning. I was seriously inconvenienced because of **the delay**. (The reader knows that we are writing about the **delay caused by the bus not coming**)
-

# WHEN TO USE THE

We can use **the** when the reader knows which thing we are writing/speaking about. Often this is because we are not writing/speaking about this thing for the first time:

- Several undergraduates at Oxford University have recently been accused of submitting work to their tutors which they had not actually written themselves. **The students** concerned may well be expelled from **the university**. (We are clearly writing about **Oxford University** and **the students who have been accused of cheating**)
- **The arguments** previously discussed shed some light on this controversy. (The reader knows which **arguments** we are writing about. We are writing about the **arguments previously discussed**)

# WHEN TO USE THE

We can use **the** when the reader knows which thing we are writing/speaking about. Often this is because the context makes it clear which noun we are referring to:

- I don't know why you couldn't find **the shopping**. I left it behind **the door** in **the kitchen**. (This is obviously **the shopping** left behind **the door** and **the kitchen** in the house where we live)
- Our flat is easy to find. Turn left out of **the station** and walk along **the main road** until you reach **the football stadium**. Cross at **the traffic lights** and **the flat** is on **the corner**, right in front of you. (There is only one possibility in each case)

# WHEN TO USE THE

We can use **the** when the reader knows which thing we are writing/speaking about. This is often because the thing is defined by a relative clause:

- **The** children who live in poverty should be helped.
- We need to be aware of **the** dangers (which are) connected with spending too much time online.
- I'd like to ask you about **the** presentation which you prepared.
- **The** books which are not bought are often pulped.
- **The** engineers who constructed the building should be praised.
- I'm sorry I drank **the** beer (which) you'd left in the fridge.

# WHEN TO USE **THE**

We can use **the** when the reader knows which thing we are writing/speaking about. This is often because the thing is defined by extra information:

- **The** right to freedom of speech is of fundamental importance.
- **The** opportunity to work for a company like that only presents itself once in a lifetime.
- **The** fall in demand for single-use plastics has been remarkable.
- I'm afraid I'm going to have to move because of **the** increase in how much rent I'm having to pay.
- **The** chart under discussion refers to sales of fresh fruit.
- **The** statistics in question indicates that economic growth is low.

# WHEN TO USE THE

We can use **the** when the reader knows which thing we are writing/speaking about. This is often because the thing is defined by adding **of + noun**. **Noun + of + noun** is a common structure:

- **The popularity of online gaming** worries some psychologists.
- **The loss of a pet** can be a traumatic experience.
- There has been a sharp rise in **the price of coffee**.
- Analysts claim that **the level of inflation** is dangerously high.
- **The behaviour of children** is certainly worth studying.
- **The temperature of the material** is checked constantly.
- **The success of this approach** will depend on various factors.

# WHEN TO USE **THE**

We can use **the** when the reader knows which thing we are writing/speaking about. This is often because the thing is defined by adding **of + noun**. **Noun + of + noun** is a common structure:

- **The feeling of satisfaction** you get from passing your driving test is amazing.
- Governments faced with **the threat of terrorism** often put extra security measures in place.

Clauses with **-ing** forms can also define the noun:

- **The likelihood of prisoners re-offending** is incredibly high.
- **The policy of allowing sixteen-year-olds to leave school** is flawed.
- **The thought of having to get up so early** worries me.



# WHEN TO USE THE

We can use **the** when the reader knows which thing we are writing/speaking about. This sometimes happens even when the noun is not specifically identified:

- Many people who get married think about **the wedding** itself, **the beautiful dress**, **the ceremony**, **the photographs**, and **the party**. They may not consider what might come later: **the arguments**, **the disagreements**, **the quarrels** and **the rows**.
- Some people are put off from applying to university. **The lengthy application process**, **the interview** and **the difficult questions** make them look at other alternatives.



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# GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

## Articles

### USING THE (PART 2)

# EXPLANATION

- The use of **ARTICLES** (**a, an, the** and the **zero article**) is one of the most difficult areas of grammar.
- IELTS candidates who only make a small number of mistakes with **ARTICLES** when they speak and write often get a high grade for **GRAMMATICAL RANGE AND ACCURACY**.
- When you write or speak English, you have to make decisions about **ARTICLES** in nearly every sentence.
- There are several important situations when we usually use **the**.

# WHEN TO USE **THE**

We can use **the** when we make general statements using singular countable nouns:

- **The computer** has fundamentally changed the way we interact with our fellow-humans (This sentence is about the general idea of computers, and not about any actual, real, individual computers)
- **The motorcar** was first developed in the late nineteenth century. At that time, nobody could have imagined what an impact it would have on our way of life (This refers to the idea/concept of motorcars)
- Some say that **the smartphone** is the greatest invention since **the wheel** (This sentence is about the general concept of smartphones and wheels. It does not refer to specific, actual, real smartphones or wheels)

# WHEN TO USE **THE**

We can use **the** when there is only one possible noun:

- It has been estimated that **the sun** is approximately nine billion years old. (There are many suns in the universe, but we are obviously writing about the sun in our solar system, and there is only one sun in our solar system)
- **The climate** has already begun to change, though not necessarily in ways which scientists predicted. (There may be climates on other planets, but this sentence clearly refers to the climate on our planet. There is only one climate on our planet)

# WHEN TO USE THE

We can use **the** when there is only one possible noun:

- Figures show that many jobs were created in **the banking industry** between 1990 and 2004. (There is only one banking industry. You could argue that each country has its own banking industry but here we are writing about the global banking industry or the national banking industry in a particular country)
- Unless we take greater care of **the environment**, future generations will struggle to survive. (There may be environments on other planets, but it is clear that this sentence refers to the environment on our planet. There is only one environment on our planet)
- **The human race** faces enormous challenges. (There is only one human race)



# WHEN TO USE THE

We can use **the** when there is only one possible noun:

- There is no point worrying about what happened in **the past** and little benefit from being frightened about what might happen in **the future**. All we can do is to try to be happy in **the present**. (There is only one past, one present and one future)
- When humans look at **the sky**, they often wonder if there are other life-forms out there, living light-years away. (It is obvious that this sentence refers to the sky on our planet. There is only one sky)
- **The internet** has changed how we live and how we interact with others (There is only one internet)

# WHEN TO USE A/AN

However, when we want to describe a particular example of a unique noun/thing, we often use **a/an**:

- I love waking up to **a clear blue sky** and **a bright sun**. (There are other types of **sky**, such as a **dark sky**. There are other types of **sun**, such as a **low sun**)
- Nobody wants future generations to have to deal with **a climate which is entirely unpredictable**. (There are other types of **climate**, such as a **stable climate**)
- **A future with driverless cars** and many more automated processes seems very likely. (There are other types of **future**, such as a **simpler future**)

# WHEN TO USE **THE**

We usually use **the** with superlatives

- **The easiest** way to reduce unemployment is for the government to employ more workers.
- **The most important** feature of this graph is that overall consumption of foreign holidays rose sharply.
- **The most popular** soap-stars, sports-stars and singers can command enormous salaries these days.
- **The longest-running** soap opera in Britain has been on the radio for more than sixty years.
- I'm afraid that 's **the silliest** suggestion I've ever heard.

# WHEN TO USE **THE**

We usually use **the** with superlatives

- **One of the biggest** changes was that far fewer school-leavers applied for work in the manufacturing sector.
- **The second most valuable** commodity referred to in the graph is coffee.
- **By far the most effective** strategy is to refuse to take any notice of what the child is doing.

When there is a possessive, we do not use **the**:

- The building is in **Kazakhstan's biggest** city.
- This is **our most pressing** challenge.

# WHEN TO USE **THE**

We usually use **the** with adjectives such as **first; second; third; last; final; next; previous** etc.:

- **The first** important argument relates to physical health.
- **The second** reason why people commit crimes is slightly less obvious.
- **The final** point worth making is that play develops a child's imagination.
- In **the previous** paragraph it was suggested that the benefits to physical health are enormous. It should also be noted that mental health can be positively affected.
- During **the next** phase of the process, water is pumped through the chamber.



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# GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

## Articles

### USING THE (PART 3)



# EXPLANATION

- The use of **ARTICLES** (**a, an, the** and the **zero article**) is one of the most difficult areas of grammar.
- IELTS candidates who only make a small number of mistakes with **ARTICLES** when they speak and write often get a high grade for **GRAMMATICAL RANGE AND ACCURACY**.
- When you write or speak English, you have to make decisions about **ARTICLES** in nearly every sentence.
- There are specific occasion when using **the** is vital in the IELTS Writing Test.

# WHEN TO USE THE

In some important IELTS Writing Task 1 (academic) expressions:

- At the beginning of the period, only about a third of respondents reported being in full-time education.
- At/Towards/Near the end of the period, the vast majority of households still possessed a video-recorder.
- In the middle of the period, the amount of food which was exported was relatively high.
- Over/During the thirty years referred to in the data/chart/table, a clear upward trend in technology sales can be identified.

# WHEN TO USE **THE**

In some important **IELTS Writing Task 2** expressions:

- the economy; the environment; the internet; the media
- the distant/recent past; the present; the foreseeable future
- the cost of living; the standard of living; the quality of life
- the tourist/banking sector; the steel/car industry
- the planet; the world; the globe
- the developed/industrialised world; the developing world; The Third World; The West; The East
- the government; the authorities; the powers-that-be

# WHEN TO USE **THE**: EXAMPLES

In some important **IELTS Writing Task 2** expressions:

- **The** government seems to focus its efforts on **the** economy and apparently neglects **the** environment almost entirely. Some in **the** media have criticised this focus on **the** cost of living and **the** standard of living, which seems to have been accompanied by a willingness to ignore **The Greenhouse Effect**.
- **The** freedom of **the** press should be guaranteed across **the** whole world / entire planet / globe.
- **The** death penalty remains a controversial issue.

# WHEN TO USE **THE**: EXAMPLES

In some important **IELTS Writing Task 2** expressions:

- **The** internet is having a huge impact. **The** entire human race seems to have been affected by it.
- In every corner of **the** globe - in **the** developing world and **the** developed world alike – **the** quality of life is improving.
- In **the** recent past, child labour was widespread. Hopefully, in **the** foreseeable future it will be entirely eradicated.
- Young graduates now find it incredibly difficult to get work in **the** financial/banking sector. Many are forced to consider jobs in **the** tourism industry instead.



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# GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

## Articles

### USING THE (PART 4)



# EXPLANATION

- The use of **ARTICLES** (**a, an, the** and the **zero article**) is one of the most difficult areas of grammar.
- IELTS candidates who only make a small number of mistakes with **ARTICLES** when they speak and write often get a high grade for **GRAMMATICAL RANGE AND ACCURACY**
- When you write or speak English, you have to make decisions about **ARTICLES** in nearly every sentence.
- We use **the** in lots of phrases connected with **geography**.

# WHEN TO USE THE

We use **the** to refer to mountain ranges, oceans etc.:

- **Mountain ranges:** **The Andes**; **The Himalayas**
- **Oceans:** **The Indian Ocean**; **The Pacific**; **The Atlantic**
- **Rivers:** **The Danube**; **The Yangtze**
- **Deserts:** **The Sahara**; **The Kalahari**
- **EXAMPLE:** Climate change is affecting every aspect of our planet: temperatures in mountain ranges such as **The Himalayas** are rising and the level of salinity in parts of **The Atlantic** has gone up astonishingly quickly.

# WHEN TO USE THE

We use **the** in expressions with **north, south, east and west**:

- I live in **the south** of Russia.
- **The north** of the country is more industrialised than **the south**.
- People who live in **the east** of Canada have often never been to **the west** of the country.
- It is sometimes said that those living in **The West** have very little understanding of life in other parts of the world. Although it is probably a generalisation, there is some truth in that statement.

# WHEN TO USE **THE**

We sometimes use **the** with names of countries and organisations:

- Countries with plural names: **The Netherlands; The United States**
- Countries which are formed by groups of islands: **The Maldives; The Seychelles; The Bahamas; The Philippines**
- Countries with longer names: **The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; The People's Republic of China; The Czech Republic; The United Kingdom; The United States of America; The United Arab Emirates**
- Organisations (including ones with acronyms said as letters): **The UN; The UNHCR; The EU; The WHO; The IMF; The World Bank; The Red Cross/Crescent; UNESCO; NAFTA**

# WHEN TO USE **THE**: EXAMPLES

We sometimes use **the** with names of countries and organisations:

- **The United States** is clearly a dominant world power. However, **The People's Republic of China** and other trading groups like **The European Union** are likely to challenge its supremacy.
- Low-lying island groups such as **The Maldives**, **The Bahamas** and **The Seychelles** are particularly vulnerable to the effects of rising sea-levels.
- There is a great deal of international respect for organisations such as **The Red Crescent**, but significantly less for **The IMF** and even **The UN**.

# WHEN TO USE THE

We use **the** in quite a lot of other phrases connected with geography:

- The statistics indicate that although levels of poverty are higher in **the southern hemisphere** than in **the northern hemisphere**, this gap is closing rapidly.
- Very few larger animals can survive in **the desert**.
- Most humans would find it impossible to live in **the jungle**.
- If we continue to cut down **the rainforest**, many animal species will become extinct because their natural habitats will disappear.
- It is predicted that summertime ice will completely disappear from **The Arctic** within a generation, and that ice shelves will break away from **The Antarctic** with increasing regularity.

# WHEN TO USE THE

We use **the** in quite a lot of other phrases connected with geography:

- **The sun** is obviously much further away from **The Earth** than **the moon** is.
- It is sometimes believed that those living in ancient times must have gazed up at **the sun**, **the moon** and **the stars**, trying to understand their meaning. In actual fact, there is plenty of evidence that our ancestors had a deep understanding of how **the universe** worked.
- Animals living at **The South Pole** and **The North Pole** are likely to be affected by climate change far sooner than those whose natural habitats are close to **The equator**.



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# GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

## Articles

### USING THE (PART 5)

# EXPLANATION

- The use of **ARTICLES** (**a, an, the** and the **zero article**) is one of the most difficult areas of grammar.
- IELTS candidates who only make a small number of mistakes with **ARTICLES** when they speak and write often get a high grade for **GRAMMATICAL RANGE AND ACCURACY**
- When you write or speak English, you have to make decisions about **ARTICLES** in nearly every sentence.
- We often use **the** when we want **to describe groups**.

# WHEN TO USE THE

We often use **the** in expressions which describe a group of people:

- **The young** are often treated with great suspicion by **the police**.
- **The general public** is thoroughly fed up with the current political system.
- **The British** and **The French** have had a long and complex relationship over the centuries.
- Those serving in **the armed forces** should be well paid.
- Volunteers work in **the fire service** and for **the coastguard**.
- **The authorities** need to take steps immediately.
- **The government** is often unpopular.

# WHEN TO USE **THE**

We often use **the** in expressions with adjectives used as nouns:

- **the** rich; **the** wealthy; **the** well-off; **the** affluent ( = those in society with lots of money)
- **the** privileged ( = those in society who have the best opportunities)
- **the** poor; **the** impoverished ( = those in society without money)
- **the** destitute; **the** dispossessed ( = those in society who have nothing)

# WHEN TO USE **THE**

We often use **the** in expressions with adjectives used as nouns:

- **the** underprivileged; **the** disadvantaged ( = those in society who have fewest chances and opportunities)
- **the** unemployed ( = those who do not have a job)
- **the** homeless ( = those who do not have a home)
- **the** hungry ( = those who do not have enough food)
- **the** weak; **the** vulnerable ( = those in society who are not strong)

# WHEN TO USE **THE**

We often use **the** in expressions with adjectives used as nouns:

- **the** elderly ( = those in society who are old)
- **the** disabled ( = people in society who do not have a physical, mental or emotional ability which others have)
- **the** healthy
- **the** (chronically/terminally) sick
- **the** happy
- **the** young

# WHEN TO USE **THE**: EXAMPLES

- **The** affluent are generally extremely unwilling to pay higher taxes so that the living standards of **the** destitute and **the** dispossessed can be raised.
- It infuriates me that **the** privileged sit on their luxury yachts sipping champagne without a care in the world.
- I am of the opinion that the principal role of government is to feed **the** hungry, house **the** homeless, offer work to **the** unemployed and care for **the** sick in society.
- Most of us have almost no idea what life is like for **the** underprivileged in society.



# WHEN TO USE **THE**

We can use **the** when we define a group after phrases like **all of, most of, many of, some of, few of, a few of, several of, a couple of, none of**:

- Few students struggle with exam nerves.
- **Few of the** students studying at my university found the exam nearly impossible.
- Almost all drivers have had an accident at some time or other.
- Almost **all of the** drivers who responded to the survey claimed never to have had an accident.

# WHEN TO USE THE

We can use **the** when we define a group after phrases like **all of, most of, many of, some of, few of, a few of, several of, a couple of, none of**:

- Most doctors have spent seven or eight years studying medicine.
- **Most of the** doctors in Cuba are extremely well-qualified.
- A significant proportion of New Yorkers admitted that they did not always feel safe in the city.
- **A significant proportion of the** New Yorkers who were surveyed admitted that they sometimes felt unsafe in the city.

# WHEN TO USE **THE**

We can use **the** when we define a group after phrases like **all of, most of, many of, some of, few of, a few of, several of, a couple of, none of**:

- Some countries are beginning to experience extreme weather, which could be the result of global warming.
- **Some of the** countries in Latin America have suffered recently from flooding and landslides.
- A few mistakes can be tolerated.
- **A few of the** mistakes made by IELTS candidates are really unnecessary.

# WHEN TO USE **THE**

We can use **the** when we define a group after phrases like **all of, most of, many of, some of, few of, a few of, several of, a couple of, none of**:

- Hardly any people still live in the countryside.
- **Hardly any of the** people who I studied at school with still live in the countryside.
- No trains have been running, due to the excessively cold weather.
- **None of the** trains which were scheduled to leave the station have actually departed.



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# GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

## Articles

### THE ZERO ARTICLE

# EXPLANATION

- The use of **ARTICLES** (**a, an, the** and the **zero article**) is one of the most difficult areas of grammar.
- IELTS candidates who only make a small number of mistakes with **ARTICLES** when they speak and write often get a high grade for **GRAMMATICAL RANGE AND ACCURACY**
- When you write or speak English, you have to make decisions about **ARTICLES** in nearly every sentence.
- Sometimes we do not use an **ARTICLE** with a **NOUN**. This is called **THE ZERO ARTICLE**.



# WHEN TO USE **NO ARTICLE**

We can use **the** when we make general statements using singular countable nouns. However, when we want to refer to a general concept or idea and the noun is plural or uncountable, we do not usually include an article:

- **Libraries** should be built in every town (**Libraries** is a plural countable noun. This sentence is about libraries in general)
- **Motorists** should have to take **driving tests** every year (**Motorists** and **driving tests** are plural countable nouns. This sentence is about **motorists** in general, and not a specific group of **motorists**. It also refers to the general idea of **driving tests**, and not to specific **driving tests**)

# WHEN TO USE **NO ARTICLE**

- **Music** and **dance** should be an important part of a child's education. (**Music** and **dance** are uncountable nouns. We are referring to the general idea and not to a specific **piece of music** or a specific **dance**)
- Although it is said that **chocolate** can damage your health, some studies have shown that it can actually have a positive effect. (**Chocolate** is an uncountable noun. We are referring to the general idea of **chocolate** and not to a specific, actual or real **piece of chocolate**)
- **Doctors, nurses** and **teachers** should be paid higher salaries. (We are writing about **doctors, nurses** and **teachers** in general. We are not writing about specific examples)

# WHEN TO USE NO ARTICLE

- **Ships** have been replaced by **planes** to transport **freight** from one part of the world to another. (We refer to **ships, planes and freight** in general)
- These days, **information** is central to our development. (We are not referring to a particular **piece of information**)
- **Intolerance** and **racist and sexist attitudes** need to be challenged. (We are writing about the general ideas of **intolerance** and **racist and sexist attitudes**. We are not writing about specific examples)

# WHEN TO USE **NO ARTICLE**

- I believe that **men** and **women** should receive equal pay. (This sentence is not about a specific group of **men** and **women**)
- **People** who work in **factories** often receive **low wages**. (This sentence is about **people**, **factories** and **low wages** in general)
- **Plastic bottles** can usually be recycled but **consumers** often just throw them away. (This sentence is about **plastic bottles** and **consumers** in general)
- **Newspapers** and **magazines** are far less popular than they used to be. (This sentence is about **newspapers** and **magazines** in general)
- **Alcoholic drinks** are often sold at **sporting occasions**. (This sentence is about **alcoholic drinks** and **sporting occasions** in general)

# WHEN TO USE **NO ARTICLE**

If you use **the** with this type of noun, your reader will think that you are referring to a specific/particular group or thing:

- I believe that **the women** and **the men** should receive equal pay ( = **the women** and **the men** we have already spoken about; **the women** and **the men** who work in this company etc. )
- **The computers** definitely need replacing ( = **the computers** which we are already talking about; **the computers** in the office which we are talking about; **the computers** in the office where we are sitting)
- **The information** was completely inaccurate. ( = **the information** they gave me; **the information** we have been talking about)

# WHEN TO USE **NO ARTICLE**

In some important expressions with prepositions, such as:

- **at home; at work; at school; at university**
- **in bed; in hospital; in prison**
- **by bus; by car; by train; by plane**
- **at night; at midnight; at midday**
- **at Christmas; in September**
- **in pain; in trouble; in danger; in debt; in peril; at risk**

# WHEN TO USE **NO ARTICLE**: EXAMPLES

- Many undergraduates studying **at university** still live **at home**, largely for financial reasons.
- In some cases, employees reported feeling more stress while travelling to their office **by bus** or **by train** than when they were actually **at work**.
- Recuperating patients **in hospital** are often encouraged not to stay **in bed** all day. They are, in extreme cases, asked to get up **at night**, even when they complain that they are **in pain**.
- Students who fail to attend university classes are clearly **at risk** of being expelled from their course. Even if this drastic step is not taken, they are **in danger** of failing their exams.

# WHEN TO USE **NO ARTICLE**

## With abstract nouns:

- Teachers require a wide range of qualities such as **patience, tolerance, understanding** and **empathy**.
- It is estimated that **anxiety** affects a far larger proportion of teenagers than it did at any point in the past.
- Many of us are uncomfortable with **silence**. We generally prefer **noise**.
- I have to admit to treating this suggestion with a mixture of **cynicism** and **scepticism**.



# WHEN TO USE **NO ARTICLE**

With abstract nouns:

- **Happiness** is extremely difficult to define or explain.
- One of the biggest problems facing the elderly is **loneliness**.
- The only thing we should fear is **fear** itself.
- **Time** is our greatest enemy.
- **Wisdom** is one of the greatest virtues a person can have.

# WHEN TO USE NO ARTICLE

However, we can use **the** with abstract nouns if we define them or make it clear that we are referring to a particular example of an abstract noun:

- **The** happiness I felt when I got my exam results is almost indescribable.
- We need to take steps to reduce **the** loneliness which elderly people often feel.
- I was incredibly impressed by him as a teacher. **The** patience he showed when dealing with demanding children was extraordinary.



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**P**repare for {IELTS}

## PREPARE for IELTS: Grammar Exercises

Look at the following sentences. Decide if each gap should be filled by **a**, **an**, **the** or **nothing** (-):

1. At \_\_\_\_\_ beginning of \_\_\_\_\_ period under discussion, \_\_\_\_\_ number of people living in \_\_\_\_\_ south of \_\_\_\_\_ country was significantly higher than \_\_\_\_\_ number of residents living in \_\_\_\_\_ north.
2. During \_\_\_\_\_ twenty-year period in question, \_\_\_\_\_ pizzas were \_\_\_\_\_ most popular takeaway food. \_\_\_\_\_ hamburgers were slightly less popular than \_\_\_\_\_ pizzas and \_\_\_\_\_ kebabs were \_\_\_\_\_ least popular type of food in this category.
3. Probably \_\_\_\_\_ most important reason why \_\_\_\_\_ people decide to emigrate relates to \_\_\_\_\_ economic factors. \_\_\_\_\_ factor which often has \_\_\_\_\_ biggest influence is \_\_\_\_\_ unemployment. \_\_\_\_\_ poor quality housing also forces many individuals to consider emigration.
4. Many parts of \_\_\_\_\_ world have been affected by changes in \_\_\_\_\_ environment. For instance, \_\_\_\_\_ amount of rain which falls in \_\_\_\_\_ Himalayas has changed, \_\_\_\_\_ Nile has flooded more frequently and \_\_\_\_\_ number of storms in \_\_\_\_\_ Atlantic has gone up. Thanks to \_\_\_\_\_ Greenhouse Effect, \_\_\_\_\_ global temperatures are rising. As \_\_\_\_\_ result of damage to \_\_\_\_\_ ozone layer, \_\_\_\_\_ sun is having \_\_\_\_\_ major effect on \_\_\_\_\_ climate.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ economy of \_\_\_\_\_ United Kingdom has been struggling for some years. Although \_\_\_\_\_ increasing number of \_\_\_\_\_ British people work in \_\_\_\_\_ banking, \_\_\_\_\_ finance, \_\_\_\_\_ tourism and \_\_\_\_\_ education, \_\_\_\_\_ percentage working in \_\_\_\_\_ areas like \_\_\_\_\_ manufacturing has fallen sharply.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ terrorism is \_\_\_\_\_ very serious issue for many governments. \_\_\_\_\_ large proportion of \_\_\_\_\_ population fears being killed or injured by \_\_\_\_\_ bomb. This is partly because \_\_\_\_\_ websites and \_\_\_\_\_ newspapers publish \_\_\_\_\_ stories about \_\_\_\_\_ possibility of \_\_\_\_\_ terrorist attack.

### ANSWERS

1. At the beginning of the period under discussion, the number of people living in the south of the country was significantly higher than the number of residents living in the north.
2. During the twenty-year period in question, - pizzas were the most popular takeaway food. - Hamburgers were slightly less popular than - pizzas and - kebabs were the least popular type of food in this category.
3. Probably the most important reason why - people decide to emigrate relates to - economic factors. The factor which often has the biggest influence is - unemployment. - Poor quality housing also forces many individuals to consider emigration.
4. Many parts of the world have been affected by changes in the environment. For instance, the amount of rain which falls in The Himalayas has changed, The Nile has flooded more frequently and the number of storms in The Atlantic has gone up. Thanks to the Greenhouse Effect, - global temperatures are rising. As a result of damage to the ozone layer, the sun is having a major effect on the climate.

5. The economy of The United Kingdom has been struggling for some years. Although an increasing number of - British people work in - banking, - finance, - tourism and - education, the percentage working in - areas like - manufacturing has fallen sharply.
6. - Terrorism is a very serious issue for many governments. A large proportion of the population fears being killed or injured by a bomb. This is partly because - websites and - newspapers publish - stories about the possibility of a terrorist attack.

## PREPARE for IELTS: Grammar Exercises

Look at the following sentences. Decide if each gap should be filled by **a**, **an**, **the** or **nothing (-)**:

1. There is \_\_\_\_\_ large and widening gap between \_\_\_\_\_ rich and \_\_\_\_\_ poor. It seems totally unfair that \_\_\_\_\_ wealthy sip champagne on luxury yachts and drive \_\_\_\_\_ fast cars while \_\_\_\_\_ dispossessed struggle to make ends meet.
2. When \_\_\_\_\_ children are at \_\_\_\_\_ school, they often behave completely differently to when they are at \_\_\_\_\_ home. Parents often find \_\_\_\_\_ difference quite hard to understand.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ scientists have developed \_\_\_\_\_ new theory about \_\_\_\_\_ causes of cancer. \_\_\_\_\_ new approach focusses on \_\_\_\_\_ genetic factors far more than on \_\_\_\_\_ environmental factors. However, \_\_\_\_\_ researchers involved have emphasised that \_\_\_\_\_ unhealthy adults are at \_\_\_\_\_ risk of developing cancer and should start to have \_\_\_\_\_ healthier lifestyle.
4. Quite \_\_\_\_\_ lot of \_\_\_\_\_ children choose to apply for \_\_\_\_\_ place at \_\_\_\_\_ university. \_\_\_\_\_ few students decide to take \_\_\_\_\_ vocational qualification. \_\_\_\_\_ small number of eighteen-year-olds prefer to look for \_\_\_\_\_ job.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ most important qualities which \_\_\_\_\_ teacher needs include \_\_\_\_\_ patience, \_\_\_\_\_ tolerance and \_\_\_\_\_ understanding.
6. Anyone who uses \_\_\_\_\_ internet regularly will see \_\_\_\_\_ lot of \_\_\_\_\_ news and \_\_\_\_\_ great deal of \_\_\_\_\_ information. Those who spend \_\_\_\_\_ large amount of their time online will also come across \_\_\_\_\_ significant amount of \_\_\_\_\_ advice. Some of \_\_\_\_\_ advice will be good but, unfortunately, \_\_\_\_\_ lot of it will probably be useless.

## ANSWERS

1. There is **a** large and widening gap between **the** rich and **the** poor. It seems totally unfair that **the** wealthy sip champagne on luxury yachts and drive **-** fast cars while **the** dispossessed struggle to make ends meet.
2. When **-** children are at **-** school, they often behave completely differently to when they are at **-** home. Parents often find **the** difference quite hard to understand.
3. **-** Scientists have developed **a** new theory about **the** causes of cancer. **The** new approach focusses on **-** genetic factors far more than on **-** environmental factors. However, **the** researchers involved have emphasised that **-** unhealthy adults are at **-** risk of developing cancer and should start to have **a** healthier lifestyle.
4. Quite **a** lot of **-** children choose to apply for **a** place at **-** university. **A** few students decide to take **a** vocational qualification. **A** small number of eighteen-year-olds prefer to look for **a** job.
5. **The** most important qualities which **a** teacher needs include **-** patience, **-** tolerance and **-** understanding.
6. Anyone who uses **the** internet regularly will see **a** lot of **-** news and **a** great deal of **-** information. Those who spend **a** large amount of their time online will also come across **a** significant amount of **-** advice. Some of **the** advice will be good but, unfortunately, **a** lot of it will probably be useless.

across a significant amount of - advice. Some of the advice will be good but, unfortunately, a lot of it will probably be useless.

## PREPARE for IELTS: Grammar Exercises

Look at the following sentences. Decide if it is correct to use **a** or **an** in each case:

1. Going to **a/an** open-day before actually applying to **a/an** university can be **a/an** useful experience.
2. **A/An** European survey, funded by **a/an** EU department, has discovered that foreigners often visualise British people carrying **a/an** umbrella.
3. It would be **a/an** honour to meet **a/an** MP, particularly **a/an** honest one.
4. During **a/an** one-week holiday we only had **a/an** hour of sunshine.
5. **A/An** FBI agent has sent **a/an** SOS message.

### ANSWERS

1. Going to **an** open-day before actually applying to **a** university can be **a** useful experience.
2. **A** European survey, funded by **an** EU department, has discovered that foreigners often visualise British people carrying **an** umbrella.
3. It would be **an** honour to meet **an** MP, particularly **an** honest one.
4. During **a** one-week holiday we only had **an** hour of sunshine.
5. **An** FBI agent has sent **an** SOS message.