

The Writing Center

Articles: Indefinite (a/an) and Definite (the)

The indefinite articles **a** and **an** refer generally to singular, countable nouns. The article **a** is used before singular, countable nouns that begin with a consonant sound, while the article **an** is used before singular, countable nouns that begin with a vowel sound:

a student, **a** thesis statement, **a** university /// **an** answer, **an** opportunity, **an** hour

Indefinite articles are used when

- Making generalizations: **A** college education leads to **a** degree.
- When something is mentioned for the first time: Our history professor assigned **an** exam for next Monday.
- When the meaning is “one” and not more: I have to write **an** essay for tomorrow.

The definite article **the** is used with nouns (singular or plural, countable or uncountable) to indicate a specific person, place, or thing when

- the listener or reader knows (or can assume) that only one specific noun is being talked or written about: It is helpful to study in **the** library.
- when a non-specific noun is mentioned more than one time: Tony bought a computer yesterday. He paid for **the** computer with money he earned by working after school.
- When an adjective clause is used after the noun. In many cases, the adjective clause makes the noun specific, so **the** is used before it: Do you know **the** consultant who is sitting behind the desk now?
- When the superlative form of adjectives (adjective + -est or most + adjective) is used with a noun. In this situation, **the** is used as part of the superlative form: **The** most intelligent people are not always those with **the** highest grades.
- With **ordinal** numbers: Their son was born on **the seventh** of March, 1998.
- Before general names for academic or educational institutions followed by of and an identifying name: He's studying at **the** University of Illinois in Chicago.
- before plural expressions of nationality (to indicate, generally, the people of a country or culture): **The** Chinese have a very long history.
- Before certain **adjectives** (to mean “[adjective] people” in general): There are many shelters for **the** homeless in Uptown.

When Not to Use Articles

- In general, do **not** use articles before a title and a name:

NOT: **The** Professor Schulte will lecture at 11:00 AM.

BUT: Professor Schulte will lecture at 11:00 AM.

- In general, do **not** use articles before one-word names of countries):

NOT: **The** Argentina is located in **the** South America.

BUT: Argentina is located in South America.

- In general, do **not** use articles before the names of educational institutions when the names begin with a proper noun:

NOT: She attended **the** DePaul University in Chicago.

BUT : She attended DePaul University in Chicago.

- Do **not** use articles before the names of academic (school) subjects:

NOT: John is majoring in **the** Biology.

BUT: John is majoring in Biology.

- Do **not** use articles before abstract nouns:

NOT: **The** knowledge and the wisdom are two very different things.

BUT: Knowledge and wisdom are two very different things.

Articles Practice #1

I. Read each sentence and decide if it is a correct representation of article usage. If the sentence is correct, write "C". If it is incorrect, write "IC".

- ___ 1) I got excellent grade on the exam today.
- ___ 2) I am going to study Spanish in the Ecuador next summer.
- ___ 3) The lunch I ate in the cafeteria yesterday was exquisite.
- ___ 4) United States includes forty-eight intercontinental states.
- ___ 5) A computer has changed the way people communicate with the world.
- ___ 6) Can you tell me a little about the research you're doing at the moment?
- ___ 7) After I graduate from Truman, I plan to transfer to the University of Iowa.

II. The following text is missing articles. Fill in each space with the appropriate article (**a/an, the, Ø**). (From "Here's Where the Money Is," CIE Articles lesson)

(1) ___ richest man in (2) ___ USA is Bill Gates, (2) ___ chairman of (3) ___ Microsoft. (4) ___ billionaire, who is known to have (5) ___ boyish streak, gives (6) ___ 'theme' parties for (7) ___ his employees. One theme was (8) ___ Africa. Party-goers tried to fill in names of African countries on (9) ___ giant map and played (10) ___ computer quiz game called 'Jungle Jeopardy.'

III. Proofread and correct the following text. Decide if each line uses the articles **a/an** and **the** correctly.

Cell phone or mobile telephone is a piece of equipment used for making people's lives miserable. Mobile telephone functions as device that connects people by allowing them to speak and hear one another's voices. Ironically, however, mobile telephone can be used in a variety of ways to prevent members of modern society from communicating authentically with one another. When the person uses a mobile phone to make the calls, he or she decides against face-to-face communication. Furthermore, being wrapped up in the height of a phone call can prevent one from concentrating on the more necessary tasks at hand. Lauris Muzikants, for example, the "Pitbull" look alike and amateur rapper himself, recently caused a ten car pile-up on the outskirts of the Lake Shore Drive because he was paying too much attention to his phone conversation and couldn't keep his eyes on a road.

Articles Practice #2

These questions test your cumulative knowledge of the use of articles (**a, an, the, Ø**). Read the sentences and decide which form is missing. Choose from the following forms: **a, an, the, Ø**. In some cases there is more than one possibility.

1. I am not motivated by _____ money.
2. _____ Japanese currently are importing at very high levels.
3. We never refuse to give someone a job on the basis of _____ age.
4. I enjoy _____ modern music, but don't ask me to listen to 'Drum and Bass' or I'll vomit.
5. _____ thesis statements in Olivera's essays are always poorly developed.
6. Studying for _____ exam is often a more economical use of one's time than cheating.
7. I asked for _____ advice concerning the problematic state of my limited mental capacity, but he just laughed and said I was being melodramatic.
8. _____ credit cards are a convenient way of paying for purchases.

II. Proofread and rewrite the following text. You should find and fix at least ten cases of misused articles.

Report Proposal

Topic of this report can be understood by reading a title: "Trading Systems of Fixed Income Instruments (FII) in Poland." In other words, main objectives of this paper are to describe process of bond trading in Poland, analyze its effectiveness, propose possible solutions, and compare trading systems in Poland and Lithuania. This topic was chosen because all team members share common view that FII market in Baltic countries is underdeveloped; therefore, by exploring differences between Poland and Lithuania, it may be possible to find particular spheres in which the Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia are lagging. Furthermore, as corporate bond market in Poland and other the transition economies is in its infancy, it was decided to limit topic to the government bonds.