

Grammar Reference

Unit 1

The indefinite article *a/an*

We use **a/an**:

- with nouns when referring to an unspecified thing; it means *any one*. *Bob has got **a** car and **a** bike. The car is green and the bike is blue.*
- with singular countable nouns when we want to say what somebody/something is or what someone's job is. *It is **a** cat. Mary is **an** engineer.*
- with the verb *have (got)*. *I have got **a** motorbike.*
- in certain expressions when we want to show how often we do something. *I go to the gym twice **a** week.*

We use **a**:

- before singular countable nouns which begin with a consonant sound (**a** union, **a** house).

We use **an**:

- before singular countable nouns which begin with a vowel sound (**an** hour, **an** army).

We don't use **a/an**:

- with uncountable or plural nouns. In these cases, we use **some** instead of **a/an**. *I need **some** coffee and sugar. I will buy **some** envelopes.*
- before an adjective if it is not followed by a noun. However, if the adjective is followed by a noun, we use **a** if the adjective begins with a consonant sound and **an** if the adjective begins with a vowel sound. *It is **a** construction. It is huge. It is **a** huge construction. This is Mary's house. It is impressive. It is **an** impressive house.*

The definite article *the*

We use **the**:

- with nouns when talking about something specific. *Bob has got **a** car and **a** bike. **The** car is green and **the** bike is blue.*
- with nouns that are unique (**the** sun, **the** Earth, etc).
- with names of newspapers (**the** Guardian), cinemas (**the** Odeon), theatres (**the** Empire), museums/art galleries (**the** Louvre), ships (**the** Marie Celeste), organisations (**the** United Nations).
- with the names of rivers (**the** Thames), groups of islands (**the** Seychelles), mountain ranges (**the** Alps), deserts (**the** Sahara), oceans (**the** Atlantic), canals (**the** Panama canal), countries when they include words such as **States**, **Kingdom**, **Republic** (**the** UK), names or nouns with **of** (**the** Houses of Parliament), in geographical terms such as **the** Antarctic/Arctic/equator, **the** North of Ireland, **the** North/East/South/West.
- with the names of musical instruments and dances (**the** guitar, **the** salsa).

- with the names of families (**the** Browns) and nationalities ending in **-sh**, **-ch** or **-ese** (**the** French). Other nationalities can be used with or without **the** (**the** Egyptians/Egyptians).
- with titles (**the** Queen, **the** President) **BUT** not with titles including a proper name (Queen Victoria).
- with adjectives/adverbs in the superlative form (**the** best film I have ever seen) **BUT** when **most** is followed by a noun, it doesn't take **the**. *Most people enjoy going to the cinema*
- with the words **day**, **morning**, **afternoon** and **evening**. *It was early in **the** morning when they left.* **BUT: at night, at noon, at midnight, by day/night**
- with historical periods/events (**the** last Ice Age, **the** Vietnam war). **BUT: World War I**
- with the words **only**, **last** and **first** (used as adjectives). *She was **the** only one who didn't come.*
- with the words **station**, **cinema**, **theatre**, **library**, **shop**, **coast**, **sea(side)**, **beach**, **country(side)**, **city**, **jungle**, **world**, **ground**, **weather**. *Let's go to **the** cinema.*

We do not use **the**:

- with uncountable and plural nouns when talking about something in general. *Planes are a safe means of transport. **Tea** is a very popular drink.*
- with proper nouns. ***Ann** works as a librarian.*
- with the names of sports, games, activities, days, months, celebrations, colours, drinks and meals. *We had **dinner** with the Smiths on **Friday**.*
- with languages, unless they are followed by the word **language**. *Bob speaks **Polish**, **French** and **English** fluently.* **BUT: **The French language** is spoken in parts of Canada.**
- with the names of countries which don't include the word **State**, **Kingdom** or **Republic**. ***Germany**, **India**, **Australia**.* **BUT** there are some exceptions: **the Netherlands**, **the Gambia**, **the Vatican**.
- with the names of streets (*Oxford Street*, *Penny Lane*). **BUT: **the M6**, **the A42**, squares (Trafalgar Square), bridges (London Bridge) BUT: **the Golden Gate Bridge**, parks (Hyde Park), railway stations (Euston, King's Cross), mountains (Mount Everest), individual islands (Crete), lakes (Lake Baikal) and continents (Asia).**
- with possessive adjectives or the possessive case. *That is **my** pen.*
- with the names of restaurants, shops, banks, hotels, etc which are named after the people who started them (**Harrods**, **Mario's Restaurant**).
- with the words **bed**, **hospital**, **college**, **court**, **prison**, **school**, **university** when we refer to the purpose for which they exist. *The injured men had to be taken to **hospital**.* **BUT: We went to **the hospital** to visit Harry.**
- with the word **work** (= place of work). *I need to leave **work** by 10 o'clock.*
- with the words **home**, **mother**, **father**, etc when we talk about our own home/parents.
- with **by** + means of transport (*bus/ferry/train/car etc*). *We travelled to Paris **by** train.*
- with the names of illnesses. *He's got **chicken pox**.* **BUT: flu/**the flu**, measles/**the measles**, mumps/**the mumps****