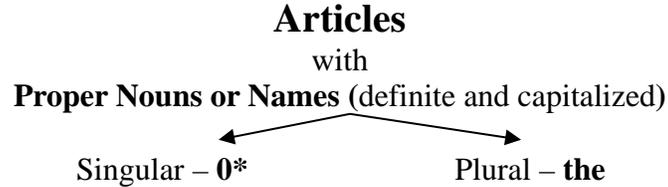


ELF Workshop - How to Use Articles with Nouns in English

By Christl Dorsey

There are two kinds of nouns in English: proper nouns and common nouns.



*0 means no article is used.

Examples of singular proper nouns

America, Germany, California, President Obama, Professor Chen, Dr. Roth, Mary, New York City, Mount Shasta, Lake Superior, Monterey Bay, Las Posas Road, Hyde Park, October, Monday, Mother's Day, English, Saturn

Examples of plural proper nouns

the United States of America, the Philippines, the Bahamas, the Hawaiian Islands, the Great Lakes, the Great Plains, the Andes (mountains), the Johnsons (the Johnson family), the Seattle Seahawks (sports team)

Some Notable Exceptions -

I. The definite article is used with some singular geographical names

1. Names of oceans, seas, gulfs, straits, rivers, and canals: *the Pacific (Ocean), the Black Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Gibraltar, the Rhine (River), the Panama Canal*
2. Names of peninsulas, forests, and deserts: *the Olympic Peninsula, the Black Forest, the Mojave Desert*
3. Names of certain places on the globe: *the North Pole, the Antarctic (the South Pole), the Equator*
4. Some geographical areas: *the Middle East, the Southwest*

II. Names of republics, unions, federations, and kingdoms usually begin with the definite article:

the Czech Republic, the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom

III. Names of newspapers often begin with the definite article; some do not:

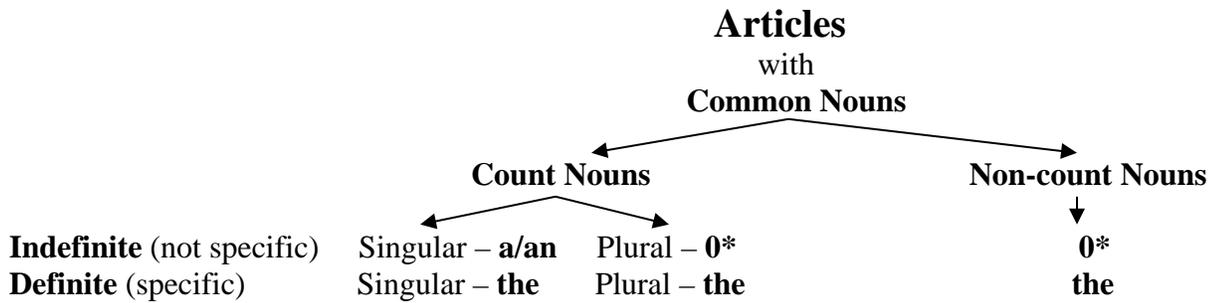
The New York Times, The Daily News, The Boston Globe -- Los Angeles Times, U-T San Diego

VI. The definite article is used when an adjective is used in place of a noun to speak of a group of people: *the Chinese, the English*

You can read more on websites such as Purdue University's Online Writing Lab at

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/> or study grammar websites for ESL learners and search "How to Use Articles."

*For seasons, diseases, subjects, the earth, the sun, the moon, the world, and the universe, see common nouns on page 2 and 3.



*0 means no article is used.

Examples of count nouns		Examples of non-count nouns considered singular
singular	plural	
<i>house, person, car, garden</i>	<i>houses, people, cars, gardens</i>	<i>water, oil, rice, furniture, money</i>

To determine whether a noun is count, non-count, or both, you have to consult a dictionary. I often use Merriam-Webster's learnersdictionary.com.

The Difference Between Indefinite, No, and Definite Articles with Common Nouns

Adapted from Professor Chen's explanations:

1. The indefinite article "a/an" is used when we mean one, any, or someone or something that our audience is not familiar with:

*I want **a** new car. He has **an** idea.* (in both sentences the audience does not know exactly which one)

The indefinite article "a/an" is also used to show inclusion in a group or professions:

*She is **a** student at Palomar College.* (one of a group) *I am **a** tutor.* (profession)

2. No article is used when we mean any, or in general, referring to common count nouns in plural form or common non-count nouns:

Students have to work hard. (any, plural count noun, students in general) *I like to drink water.* (water, non-count noun, not a specific water such as coconut water, for example)

3. The definite article "the" is used when we specify, referring to a noun or nouns that our audience is familiar with.

Here is Professor Chen's explanation, "When the audience knows what you are referring to, you use 'the.' . . . 'the' in English is akin [similar] to pointing with your finger. If you are not pointing, whether literally or figuratively, don't use 'the.'"

To make our audience familiar with a noun or nouns, we often add relative clauses or "of" phrases.

Here are some examples:

***The** car which I want to buy is a Toyota. **The** car of my dreams is a Lexus.* (with the relative clause "which I want to buy" and the "of" phrase "of my dreams," I tell the audience exactly which specific car I am talking about)

The definite article is also used when we speak of someone or something unique. For this, there are two rules; one is called the "one and only" rule--the other, the "absolutes" rule which includes superlatives in front of nouns:

The sun, the moon, the earth, the world, the universe, the White House, the president, the best, the most beautiful, the last, the first, the second, the third, etc.*

(**Earth* can be used as a proper noun, capitalized, and without the article, when we mean the planet. It

can also be used as a common noun without the article after fall/return to or down to *earth*.)

The definite article is used when we use an adjective as a noun to speak of a group of people: *the rich, the poor, the young, the elderly, etc.*

The definite article is also used for playing instruments or dancing a special dance:

*He plays **the** piano. She dances **the** waltz.*

In addition, the definite article is used before decades: *the 1990s*

When we introduce someone or something, first we use the indefinite article, then the definite one. This rule is called the "first mention and second mention" rule:

Here are some examples:

*Once upon a time, there was **a** beautiful princess. **The** princess was very sad.* (I first introduce her, using the indefinite article; afterwards, I use the definite one.)

*I have **a** beautiful car. **The** engine (of the car which I have introduced) is very quiet.*

No Article for Generalizations

When we **generalize**, we usually use common count nouns in plural form and non-count nouns **without** an article.

Here are some examples:

People are usually kind. (people is the plural form of the common count noun "person"; I am referring to people in general)

Honesty is a wonderful quality. (honesty is a non-count noun; I am referring to honesty in general)

Practice examples:

1. ___ health is precious.
2. ___ teachers work hard, so ___ students can learn.
3. ___ hard work pays off.

The definite article is also **not** used with the following:

1. Certain times of the day/night (especially after at, by, before and after): *at noon, by midnight, before dawn, after dusk*
2. Certain meals (unless it is a specific one): *breakfast, lunch, dinner, supper -- The dinner we had last night was awful.*
3. Seasons (unless it is a specific one): *spring, summer, fall (autumn), winter -- The winter of 2014 was very cold.*
4. Certain idiomatic expressions: *go to bed, go to jail,*
5. When *preschool/kindergarten/school/college/university/church/etc.* are considered institutions, **no** article is used; however, when they are considered buildings, the article **is** used: *The college on 5th Street and Highland Road.*)
6. Sometimes, after the preposition *by*: *We are traveling by train.*
7. Diseases: *cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, Ebola* (however, we say I have a cold, or the flu)
8. Subjects: *mathematics, computer science, biology, history, economics* *I study mathematics.*

Practice article. Please indicate whether the noun needs the definite, indefinite, or no article. For no article, put 0.

Pakistani Teen, Indian Activist Win Nobel Peace Prize

(Reuters) - Pakistani teenager Malala Yousafzai, who was shot in ___ head by the Taliban in 2012 for
1.

advocating girls' right to ___ education, and Indian campaigner against child trafficking and labor
2.

Kailash Satyarthi won ___ 2014 Nobel Peace Prize on ___ Friday.
3. 4.

Yousafzai, aged 17, becomes ___ youngest Nobel Prize winner and 60-year-old Satyarthi ___ first
5. 6.

Indian-born winner of ___ accolade.
7.

They were picked for their struggle against ___ oppression of ___ children and young people, and for
8. 9.

___ right of all ___ children to education, ___ Norwegian Nobel Committee said.
10. 11. 12.

___ sharing of ___ award between an Indian and a Pakistani came after ___ week of ___ hostilities
13. 14. 15. 16.

along ___ border of ___ disputed, mainly Muslim region of ___ Kashmir - ___ worst fighting
17. 18. 19. 20.

between ___ nuclear-armed rivals in more than ___ decade.
21. 22.

" ___ Nobel Committee regards it as an important point for a Hindu and a Muslim, an Indian and a
23.

Pakistani, to join in ___ common struggle for ___ education and against extremism," said Thorbjorn
24. 25.

Jagland, ___ head of the Norwegian Nobel Committee.
26.

Kristian Berg Harpviken, head of the Peace Research Institute in Oslo, described ___ joint award
27.

" ___ innovative prize that brings attention to ___ problems of ___ young".
28. 29. 30.

Satyarthi said he hoped to work with ___ Yousafzai for peace.
31.

"I will invite her to join hands to establish ___ peace for our subcontinent, which is a must for ___
32. 33.

children, which is a must for every Indian, for every Pakistani, for every citizen of ___ world," he said
34.

at ___ New Delhi office of his organization, Bachpan Bachao Andolan, or Save the Childhood
35.

Movement.

Yousafzai later told reporters in ___ English city of Birmingham where she now lives that she had
36.

spoken by telephone with Satyarthi on Friday and they had agreed to invite ___ prime ministers of
37.

India and Pakistan to ____ ceremony in December.
38.

" ____ tension that is going on is really disappointing and I'm really sad because I want both countries to
39.
have dialogue to have talks about peace," she said.

Yousafzai said she had found out about winning ____ Nobel Peace Prize on Friday from ____ teacher
40. 41.
during ____ chemistry lesson, adding that ____ news had come as a big surprise.
42. 43.

"This is not ____ end of this campaign which I have started. I think this is really ____ beginning. I want
44. 45.
to see every child going to school," she said, adding she felt "really honored".

Koranyi, Balazs, Alister Doyle, and Gwladys Fouche. "Pakistani Teen, Indian Activist Win Nobel Peace Prize." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters, 10 Oct. 2014. Web. 10 Oct. 2014.

Notes:

Answers for the practice article

1. the - Malala Yousafzai has been introduced, she was shot in the (her) head ("first mention and second mention" rule)
2. 0 - education, non-count noun, generalization
3. the - specific and unique prize
4. 0 - no article before singular name, Friday
5. the - the youngest (unique, the "absolutes" rule refers to superlatives)
6. the - the first (unique, the "one and only" rule)
7. the - specific accolade, meaning the Nobel Peace Prize
8. the - oppression, the following "of" phrase makes it specific
9. 0 - children, plural count noun, generalization
10. the - right, the following "of" phrase makes it specific
11. 0 - children, plural count noun, generalization
12. the - specific committee
13. The - sharing, the following "of" phrase makes it specific
14. the - award; the one we, the audience, know about
15. a - meaning one week
16. 0 - hostilities; when used in plural form, hostilities can be considered a count noun, generalization
17. the - border, the following "of" phrase makes it specific
18. the - specific region
19. 0 - no article before singular name, Kashmir
20. the - worst (unique, the "absolutes" rule)
21. the - rivals; from the context we, the audience, know that India and Pakistan are rivals; that makes them specific rivals
22. a - meaning one decade
23. The - specific committee
24. a - meaning one struggle
25. 0 - education, non-count noun, generalization
26. the - head, the following "of" phrase makes it specific
27. the - award; the one which we, the audience, know about
28. an - innovative prize, meaning one
29. the - problems, the following "of" phrase makes it specific
30. the - young, referring to a group of people
31. 0 - no article before singular name, Yousafzai
32. 0 - peace, non-count noun, generalization
33. 0 - children, plural count noun, generalization
34. the - world (unique, the "one and only" rule)
35. the - specific office, the following "of" phrase makes it specific
36. the - specific city, the following "of" phrase makes it specific
37. the - prime ministers, the following "of" phrase makes them specific
38. the - ceremony, specific; the one for the Nobel Peace Prize
39. The - specific tension, the following relative clause makes it specific
40. the - specific prize
41. a - meaning one teacher
42. a - meaning one chemistry lesson
43. the - news; non-count noun (used in plural form); the audience knows the news of the Nobel Prize
44. the - end, the following "of" phrase makes it specific
45. the - specific beginning; contrary to "the end of this campaign" in the previous sentence