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**Articles: Basic Rules**

**The aim of this resource is to:**

* **introduce you to some basic rules about the use of articles.**
* **provide you with examples as to how these rules apply.**

**A/an: introducing what is new**

* We use ***a/an*** with singular nouns to indicate:
  + that something is not common ground.
  + that we are introducing something new, something unexpected or the reader is unaware of.

**Example**

I have just seen **an** accident.

* **An** is used (instead of the) because this event is something you do not know about.
* It tells you that I do not expect you to look around you or identify which accident I am referring to.
* It is unfamiliar to you.

**The: indicating ‘common ground’**

* ***The*** is used to signal readers that they know or will soon know what we are referring to.
* ***The*** triggers the reader to search for the most obvious area of common ground in order to identify this.
* Context is usually the most important factor to help the reader comprehend the message successfully.
* We use ***the*** with a noun to refer backwards or forwards in a text or conversation.
* We also use ***the*** to refer to our shared experience or general knowledge.

**Referring to the young couple**

**Referring to the two little girls and a boy**

**Example: referring backwards**

When I was out I passed a young couple with two little girls and a boy. I thought I knew **the** parents but I did not recognise **the** children at all.

**Those children who will win**

**Example: referring forwards**

Take prizes for **the** children who win.

**Example: external reference**

Shouldn’t we pick up **the** children soon.

**Shared knowledge: our children**

* **The** is also used when something is immediately defined.

**Those who live next door**

**Example**

**The** next-door children are a pain.

**No article – Generalisations**

* We leave out articles before plural and uncountable nouns when we are referring to something general.

**Example**

I usually have ***[]*** sandwiches for lunch.

***[]*** English parsley has curly leaves.

**Source adapted from: Parrott, M 2010, *Grammar for English language teachers*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge**