



# Introduction to using ‘articles’

Articles are words or phrases that come at the beginning of a noun phrase telling us whether the information is new or familiar. They also tell us something about quantity.

## Categories of Articles

- Indefinite article: **a** and **an**
- Definite article: **the**

Note: We use the term **zero article or []** for instances where the article is left out.

## Idioms and other Fixed Expressions

- In a lot of idiomatic expressions, articles are used or left out for no apparent reasons other than they belong or don't belong in the expressions.
- In these instances, learners have to remember the whole phrase, ignoring general rules or sub-rules.

### Example

|                       |                       |                         |                     |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>a</b> bit of       | in <b>a</b> hurry     | make <b>a</b> start     | have <b>a</b> drink |
| on <b>the</b> coast   | in <b>the</b> pink    | off <b>the</b> record   | do <b>a</b> turn    |
| go to <b>the</b> wall | play <b>the</b> blues | through <b>the</b> nose |                     |
| in [] debt            | on [] loan            | out of [] action        |                     |

## Where do articles appear in sentences?

Articles are part of noun phrases and come:

- at the beginning, immediately before a noun or an adjective
- before a combination of adverb, adjective and noun

### Example

I heard **a** noise (noun)

I heard **an** eerie noise (adjective + noun)

I heard **the** strangely muffled noise (adverb + adjective + noun).

## How do we choose articles?

The kind of noun that follows the article affects our choice.

- We can leave out articles before:
  - plural nouns: **[ ] Dreams often come true**
  - uncountable nouns: **Give me [ ] money**
  
- An article is only left out before a singular noun if it is replaced with another determiner:
  - possessive adjectives: **her brother**
  - demonstrative adjectives: **that book**
  - many quantifiers: **any occasion, each day**

### Example

|            | Singular nouns  | Plural nouns     | Uncountable nouns |
|------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| a/an       | <b>a</b> book   | -                | -                 |
| no article | -               | <b>[ ]</b> books | <b>[ ]</b> rice   |
| the        | <b>the</b> book | <b>the</b> books | <b>the</b> rice   |

## References

Adapted from Parrott, M 2010, *Grammar for English language teachers*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

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