



Among the different types of stores, which do you most like to shop in and why? How much of your shopping do you do online?

GOALS

- Learn why mastering articles is important in writing
- Understand five problems writers commonly encounter with articles
- Learn and apply rules for the correct use of articles in exercises and writing assignments

LEARN WHAT THE ERROR IS

Errors with Articles

The **articles**, which belong to the group of modifiers called *determiners*, are *a(n)*, *the*, and the zero article (when no article is needed). The article *a* and the zero article are *indefinite articles*, and *the* is a *definite article*. Before vowel sounds, *an* is used instead of *a* (*a* celebration, but *an* elephant, *an* honest day's work). The editing symbol for an article error is *art*.

Errors in article use are local (less serious) errors and usually do not greatly affect how well the reader can understand what you have written. However, frequent article errors are distracting and can cause the reader to focus on article errors rather than on content. In spoken English, leaving out some articles, while incorrect, may be tolerated, but in formal written English, article errors cannot be ignored.

Suggestions for Reducing Errors

- Learn the rules presented in this unit to improve your article usage and make your writing easier to read. The rules for article usage are complex, and only the most frequent usages are covered. You can look up additional rules in an advanced ESL grammar textbook.
- Be aware that if your native language does not use articles, you must learn the rules for articles in English. However, even if your native language does use articles, you will need to become aware of any differences in their use in English.
- Memorize the use of the article with words or phrases that you often use. A particularly good strategy is to memorize phrases and terminology in your field of study, classes you are taking, or in your profession.
- Remember that listening will not help you very much in learning how to use articles because they are not stressed (said loudly and clearly) in spoken English. To learn how to use articles correctly, practice using them in writing and observe their use in your reading.
- Be careful when you read newspaper headlines because articles are often left out to save space as in, for example, "Amateur Astronomer Finds New Comet." (The article *an* has been left out before *Amateur Astronomer* and the article *a* has been left out before *New Comet*.)

Check Your Understanding

Write answers to the following questions. Share your answers with another student.

1. List the articles and label each one as a definite or indefinite article. Which article has two forms and why?
2. Why is it important for a writer to minimize article errors?

GRAMMAR JOURNAL ENTRY 11 ARTICLES

Respond to the following in your grammar journal.

1. Have you experienced difficulty with using articles? If so, discuss two strategies that you could adopt to improve your ability to use articles correctly. If you have not had many problems with article use, explain why it is not a problem for you.
2. Write a list of five nouns you use often in your daily life, at school, or in your profession. Use each word in a sentence. Then, check your sentences with a classmate, a tutor, or your instructor to see if you have used the article correctly.

UNDERSTAND COMMON PROBLEMS

This section presents five problems that writers commonly encounter with articles. First, take the pre-test to see what you already know about articles. When you finish, check your answers on page 353. Then, carefully study each problem and the examples that illustrate it. Pay particular attention to those problems that correspond to the pre-test questions you had difficulty with. Remember that becoming aware of the types of article errors you most often make will increase your chances of avoiding these errors in your writing.

Pre-test

What Do You Already Know?

Test your ability to recognize errors with articles.

- A** Correct the marked article errors. These are examples of the five common problems that are presented in this unit.

Problem 1 When a person buys a car, he or she usually has to ^{art}get loan.

Problem 2 Students often go to their advisor ^{art}for an advice.

Problem 3 Many doctors in the U.S. no longer wear ^{art}the white coat during office hours.

Problem 4 My friend called the police because ^{art}one of neighbors was having a loud party.

Problem 5 My cousin always makes sure she has ^{art}the driver's license when she goes out.

B Underline and correct the one error in each of the following sentences. (The errors are not in any particular order.)

1. In her application, Isabelle stated that she had the green card, meaning that she had a work permit.
2. We always have a fun when we go to Disneyland.
3. I am about to finish the bachelor's degree in comparative literature.
4. Most students found that one of questions on the test was difficult to answer.
5. Gustavo forgot to bring pen to the exam, so he had to borrow one from his friend.

Five Common Problems

Problem 1

No article has been used when *a(n)* or *the* is needed.

Incorrect: Yesterday, I finally went to pay my overdue fine ^{art}at library.

Correct: Yesterday, I finally went to pay my overdue fine at the library.

Incorrect: She bought ^{art}a ^{art}book and ^{art}a ballpoint pen as ^{art}a birthday gift.

Correct: She bought a book and a ballpoint pen as a birthday gift.

Incorrect: A good friend gives ^{art}an advice when asked.

Incorrect: A good friend gives ^{art}the advice when asked.

Correct: A good friend gives advice when asked.

Incorrect: My uncle has ^{art}an obvious reasons for his decision.

Correct: My uncle has obvious reasons for his decision.

Correct: My uncle has an obvious reason for his decision.

Problem 2

An article has been used where no article is needed.

Problem 3

The wrong article has been used where an article is needed.

Incorrect: My cousin lived ^{art} the productive life as a pharmacist.

Correct: My cousin lived a productive life as a pharmacist.

Incorrect: My lab partner has ^{art} a books you wanted him to find.

Correct: My lab partner has the books you wanted him to find.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Remember that you must first determine whether the noun is countable or uncountable. Then, if you are classifying (as opposed to identifying) a countable noun, use *a*. If you are classifying an uncountable or plural noun, do not use an article. To identify a noun, countable or uncountable, singular or plural, use *the*.

Problem 4

The article *the* has not been used after an *of*-phrase showing quantity.

Incorrect: All of ^{art} ^ textbooks for this class have been sold.

Correct: All of the textbooks for this class have been sold.

Note: Some *of*-phrases are *one of the*, *most of the*, *some of the*, or *half of the*.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Always use *the* after an *of*-phrase showing quantity whether the noun is countable or uncountable.

Problem 5

An article has been used where another determiner is needed.

Incorrect: Whenever I go to the library, I remember that I need ^{art} the library card.

Correct: Whenever I go to the library, I remember that I need my library card.
(*I need a library card* would also be correct but would not show possession.)

Incorrect: Restaurant employees need to wash ^{art} the hands frequently.

Correct: Restaurant employees need to wash their hands frequently.

Incorrect: She wants ^{art} a meat for dinner.

Correct: She wants some meat for dinner. (The emphasis is on the amount.)

Correct: She wants meat for dinner.

(The emphasis is not on the amount but on what she wants to eat for dinner.)

Note: Articles are part of the whole system of determiners, which includes possessive pronouns (for example: *my*, *your*), demonstrative adjectives (*this*, *these*, *that*, *those*), and quantifiers (for example: *some*, *any*, or *every*). Remember that articles classify or identify nouns; they do not show quantity or possession.

REVIEW GRAMMAR SOLUTIONS

Every time you use a common noun, a proper noun, or a noun phrase (the noun plus its modifiers) in English, you must decide between *a(n)*, *the*, or no article. Articles are used to identify or not identify a noun as specified below.

Identifying or Classifying a Common Noun

The article *the* identifies common nouns (nouns that are not capitalized).

Example:

I ate the apple in my lunch. (*The apple* identifies which apple it is: the one with my lunch.)

The article *a(n)* or no article (the zero article) does not identify a common noun but shows to what class or group the noun belongs. In the examples below, the nouns are not specifically identified.

Examples:

I eat an apple every day. (*an apple* = something that can be classified as an apple)

Your pen needs ink. (*ink* = something that can be classified as ink)

I like foreign films. (*foreign films* = things that can be classified as foreign films)

1. When you are not identifying a noun, use *a(n)* or no article.

Use *a(n)* or no article depending upon whether the noun is countable or uncountable. Countable nouns (like *book*, *test*, or *car*) can be counted and made plural, but uncountable nouns (like *writing*, *advice*, and *intelligence*) cannot be counted and do not have a plural form. Most learner's dictionaries indicate if a noun is countable or uncountable. Some nouns (like *paper* or *change*) can be either countable or uncountable depending on their meaning.

a. If the common noun is a singular countable noun, use *a(n)*.

Incorrect: Last week I bought chemistry textbook at Discount Books.

Correct: Last week I bought a chemistry textbook at Discount Books.
(The chemistry textbook is one of many chemistry texts the bookstore has; the writer has not identified a particular one.)

Incorrect: When students are taking the composition class, they often complain about the time they must spend working on their essays.

Correct: When students are taking a composition class, they often complain about the time they must spend working on their essays.

(The writer has not identified a specific class but is talking about any composition class.)

b. If the common noun is uncountable or if it is plural, use no article.

Note: The determiner *some* can be used with uncountable and plural nouns but only when an amount can be indicated.

Incorrect: Many people drink the bottled water as they prefer its taste.

Incorrect: Many people drink a bottled water as they prefer its taste.

Correct: Many people drink bottled water as they prefer its taste.

(Water is uncountable and no special type of water has been indicated.)

Incorrect: The playing badminton is my favorite activity.

Correct: Playing badminton is my favorite activity.

(Gerunds and gerund phrases [the gerund with its object and modifiers] are uncountable.)

Incorrect: Before I go to class, I had better buy a ruled notebook paper.

Correct: Before I go to class, I had better buy ruled notebook paper.

(Paper is uncountable and no amount is specified.)

Correct: Before I go to class, I had better buy some ruled notebook paper.

(Paper is uncountable and a nonspecific amount is indicated.)

Incorrect: The soft-soled shoes are to be worn at all times in the gymnasium.

Correct: Soft-soled shoes are to be worn at all times in the gymnasium.
(The writer means soft-soled shoes of any kind.)

Incorrect: The ballpoint pens must be used during the final exam.

Correct: Ballpoint pens must be used during the final exam.
(The writer has not identified any specific ballpoint pens.)

2. When you are identifying a common noun, use *the*.

a. After you have classified a noun with *a(n)*, use *the* when you use the noun again.

Incorrect: Yesterday, I found a used car that I liked and bought it.
I now have to buy insurance for a car.

Correct: Yesterday, I found a used car that I liked and bought it.
I now have to buy insurance for the car.
(*The car* means specifically the car that has already been mentioned.)

b. In the following cases, use *the*. The noun can be singular or plural, countable or uncountable.

i. The noun is identified by an adjective that identifies it as one of a kind.

Correct: The best ice cream is sold at that shop. (a superlative)

Correct: In the next chapter, we will examine verb tenses. (sequential)

Correct: She is the only student with whom I will study. (unique)

ii. The noun is identifiable to the reader and the writer through shared knowledge.

Correct: The sun is going to rise at 5:43 AM tomorrow.
(Both the reader and the writer know it is the sun we see from Earth.)

Correct: My roommate left her backpack in the computer room.
(Both the reader and the writer know which room it is.)

Correct: Some of the students will need to take a makeup test.
(Both the reader and the writer know who the students are.)

iii. The noun phrase is identified by the modification that follows it.

Correct: Last week, I finally read the article about thunderstorms that Professor Johns recommended to us.

(The article has been identified as the one about thunderstorms and the one that was recommended.)

Correct: Most of the textbooks for this class have been sold.

(The textbooks have been identified as the ones for a certain class.)

Correct: The laughter of the children made my grandfather happy.

(The noun has been identified by an *of*-phrase.)

Correct: The laughing of his grandchildren made my grandfather happy.

(Note that when a gerund or gerund phrase is identified [e.g., *of his grandchildren*], *the* is used.)

iv. The noun is part of an *of*-phrase showing quantity.

Correct: Raymond noticed that half of the cake had already been eaten.

Correct: My supervisor said that all of the fruit in that box was spoiled.

Correct: Some of the monkeys will be transferred to a bigger cage.

Using Articles with Proper Nouns

In academic and professional writing, you will often need to use the names of people, places, and things. When you are naming a particular person, place, or thing, you will use a proper noun, which is always capitalized. The rules for using articles with proper nouns have many exceptions, so it is best to learn only a few general rules and to memorize article use for those proper nouns you frequently use. You can also check article use for individual cases in an advanced ESL grammar textbook or in a learner's dictionary, or you can simply ask a fluent speaker what is correct.

Guidelines for Names of People

1. With singular names of people, no article is usually used.

Examples:

Have you read *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens?

Miriam has just finished a French quiz.

Dr. Hendrickson will be a guest lecturer in my history class today.

2. With plural family names, *the* is usually used.

Example:

Next week, the Campbells will leave for their vacation.

Guidelines for Names of Places

1. States, lakes, individual mountains, cities, streets, and universities usually use no article unless the name is introduced by a capitalized common noun (such as *City* or *University*) and *of*.

Examples:

Mount McKinley is in Alaska.

Last night, I telephoned my brother who attends Stanford University in Palo Alto, California.

The bank is located on State Street.

Ana's new job title is Public Defender for the City of New York.

The University of Arizona is on the semester system.

2. Oceans, rivers, mountain ranges, and public buildings usually use *the*.

Examples:

The Pacific Ocean keeps San Francisco cool.

The Mississippi River starts in Minnesota and ends in Louisiana.

The Rocky Mountains have good snow for skiing.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is on Fifth Avenue in New York City.

3. Singular names of countries usually use no article.

Examples:

In Switzerland, four languages are spoken.

Australia has many unusual species of animals.

4. Plural names of countries or names of countries that contain the words *united, union, kingdom, or republic* use *the*.

Examples:

The United States is a country with wide expanses of land.

The Central African Republic borders Chad.

The Seychelles are in the Indian Ocean.

Using Articles with Set Expressions

Certain set (or common) expressions use *the* or no article. To make sure that you are using the correct article, look up the expression in a learner's dictionary or ask a fluent speaker what is correct. It is also a good idea to memorize set expressions that you use frequently. The following lists will help you become aware of article use in set expressions.

COMMON SET EXPRESSIONS

WITH NO ARTICLE

after breakfast, after lunch, after dinner
at home, at school
at night
at seven o'clock
by train, by plane, by car
in class
to school, to church

WITH *THE*

in the afternoon
in the evening
in the morning
on the other hand
to get the gist of
to get the point
to play the part

IMPROVE YOUR WRITING STYLE

VARYING ARTICLES IN WRITING

In the following paragraph, pay attention to how the writer has varied the use of articles to talk about grizzly bears. Notice that the writer is talking about all bears as members of that class of animals known as grizzly bears.

The grizzly bear is a large animal that lives in North America. Grizzly bears are wild animals, but it is not uncommon for them to be seen near garbage cans in national parks. Many people feel a grizzly bear is the most frightening of animals because of its size and ferocious look. The grizzly is a very dangerous animal and should never be offered food because it has been known to kill humans.

Continued on page 248.

IMPROVE YOUR WRITING STYLE (CONT.)

In the following paragraph, notice how the writer has varied the use of articles to talk about computers in general.

Since the 1970s, the computer has come into everyday use. At one time, computers were only used in business, but now they are used by everyone. In fact, the computer now is within the price range of most people. If we were to compare inventions, the invention of the personal computer in the late 1900s has been as significant as the invention of the car was in the early 1900s.

Note: No article is used with an uncountable noun when talking about a class or when generalizing.

Examples:

Cadmium is a heavy metal.

Some people like to drink mineral water at restaurants.

BEING SPECIFIC WITH UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS

Examples:

I want water. (no amount has been specified)

I want some water. (an unidentified amount of water)

I want a glass of water. (a specific amount)

She likes to give advice. (general)

She gave me a useful piece of advice. (more specific)

She gave me the best piece of advice that I have ever received. (more specific)

PRACTICE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

EXERCISE 1

Directions: Decide whether each of the following sentences is correct (C) or if it contains any article errors, making it incorrect (I). Then, correct each article error. Some sentences may have more than one article error, and some errors can be corrected in more than one way.

Examples: I Cheryl forgot to turn in ^{an/the} assignment for her math class.

C Will you stop at the grocery store on your way home?

- ___ 1. At the end of each quarter, final exams are held.
- ___ 2. Most of students in Chemistry 1 have to study very hard.
- ___ 3. She went to the bookstore and bought pencils, a textbook, and glue.
- ___ 4. At the night, good street lighting is essential for safety.
- ___ 5. If I have problems with my car, I take bus to work.
- ___ 6. Be sure that you study night before exam.
- ___ 7. Instant noodles are quick and easy to prepare.
- ___ 8. When there is full moon, I like to walk down the Beach Avenue.
- ___ 9. In a dry state like California, the water is a precious commodity for agriculture.
- ___ 10. Although I like to write down my thoughts, I do not have time to write in the journal.

EXERCISE 2

Directions: In the following student paragraph, the articles have been used correctly. Explain why *a(n)*, no article, or *the* was used in the underlined nouns and noun phrases. The first one has been done for you.

When I was still very young, my parents taught me to love learning. Every evening after dinner, my father would teach me simple math and my mother would teach me how to write and read Chinese characters. At the age of five, I already knew a number of Chinese characters and was able to do addition, subtraction, and simple multiplication problems. It was not that I was a genius or even a precocious child; it was the simple fact that my parents encouraged me to learn by praising me whenever I gave them the correct answer to their questions. Their praise made me feel that I was smart and could learn. What

also helped me learn was that I had few distractions. I did not grow up with a television, a radio, or video games as children do now, for it was not common in China at that time to have a television or a radio at home. Therefore, our usual source of entertainment after dinner was playing games, reading, and learning. When I began school, I never had to depend on the teacher to motivate me to learn because I had already developed a love of learning. I also entered school with the attitude that I could learn because my parents' early teaching and the learning that had taken place in my house had helped me develop not only confidence in my abilities but also a sense that learning was enjoyable.

EXERCISE 3

Directions: The following student paragraph has ten missing articles. Supply the correct articles where needed. The first one has been done for you.

My attitude toward English is negatively affecting my writing. I think ^{the} problem is that as mathematics major, I love to spend time doing as much math as possible. Often my homework for math and other classes occupies most of evening. As result, I do not have much time or energy to devote to writing essays required for my English class. In addition, I usually have trouble getting started. I waste time eating, listening to music, or even looking in mirror instead of trying to work on paper, which is due on next day. Furthermore, I always have negative feeling toward writing. Even before writing paper, I assume that it will not turn out well. Because of this negative attitude, my grade in English is suffering.

EXERCISE 4

Directions: Choose a short news article to read. Then, underline all the nouns or noun phrases in the first two or three paragraphs and explain why the author used *a(n)*, no article, or *the*.

Post-test

What Do You Know Now?

A Add the missing article —*a(n)* or *the*—to each marked error.

1. In most countries, students who want to enter a university must pass difficult entrance examination.
2. One of advantages of learning a second language is the opportunity to learn more about another culture.
3. I am always very nervous about speaking in class; as result, I am usually very quiet even when I know the correct answer.
4. Although there are many ways to improve your ability to speak English, best way is to spend time with native speakers.
5. If you practice giving your next oral presentation in front of friends and family, it will help you give presentation with confidence.

B Fill in the blanks with *a(n)*, *the*, or *X* (no article) in the following sentences.

1. It is _____ well-known fact that peeling onions can make people cry.
2. By going on _____ Internet, the student was able to get a definition of the term.
3. There are three editions of this book, but you need to buy _____ latest one for this class.
4. A few of _____ students who lived in the dorms this year chose to remain next year.
5. Do you want to put _____ sugar and cream in your coffee?
6. In many states, it is against the law to send _____ text messages while driving.
7. Before starting my paper, I need to write _____ outline.
8. In _____ United States, many people commute to work by car.

- C** Find and correct the 12 errors with articles in this paragraph. The first one has been done for you. There may be more than one way to correct an error.

Many people discover the discomfort of the traveling by air after experiencing their first case of the jet lag. This condition occurs when traveler's brain releases neurochemicals according to the schedule of day and a night (light and dark) which was established at traveler's previous geographical location. During these times, people find that their bodies do not respond way that they did just day before; simply falling asleep at night or the staying awake in the afternoon can be struggle until their bodies learn to adjust to the new time zone. It would be possible to avoid jet lag if we could find a ways to adjust our biological rhythms to time zone at the destination before leaving home. However, the scientists have not yet found the answer to this problem.

APPLY WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED TO WRITING

Select a writing topic and follow the steps in Appendix A on page 337.

Topic 1:

Do you generally prefer to do most of your shopping online, or do you prefer to shop in stores? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of online shopping? With the increasing popularity and convenience of online shopping, what do stores need to do to keep customers coming in to shop in person?

Topic 2:

Think of a friend who has never seen where you live. Write a letter to this friend and describe your room or your apartment. If you live in a house, describe only your room. In your letter, tell your friend how comfortable you are living in this place or room. Alternatively, you may wish to describe your office or place of work to your friend, noting how comfortable it is for the kind of work you do.

Topic 3:

Some parents choose to have their children begin formal learning, such as learning to read or write or do simple math, before they are old enough to go to school. Do you think children should be given formal learning tasks at an early age, or do you think that children should be given maximum time to play before they are old enough to go to school? Explain your answer.

