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Articles

What is an Article?

Articles are very important words in English and so is their knowledge. Articles are used before only nouns to limit or define their uses in the context of the sentence. They impart effectiveness and accuracy to the nouns. In fact, articles are used as **demonstrative adjectives and determiners before nouns**.

There are two kinds of articles.

1. **Indefinite Articles** A, An (in the sense of 'one' and 'any')
2. **Definite Articles** The (in the sense of 'this' and 'that')

Rules of Articles

The Use of Indefinite Articles 'A' and 'An'

Rule I

The choice between 'A' and 'An' is determined primarily by **Sound**.

(A) 'A' is used before a word beginning.

(i) *With consonant. For example*

a boy	a child
a student	a book

(ii) *With a vowel giving the sound of a consonant. For example*

a one eyed man	a university student
a European	a unique book
a uniform	a universal problem

(B) 'An' is used before a word beginning.

(i) *With a vowel. For example*

an elephant	an apple
an ass	an umbrella

(ii) *With a mute 'h'. For example*

an hour	an heir
an honourable person	an honest man
an honorary post	an hourly visit

(iii) With a consonant pronounced with the sound of a vowel. For example

an LL.B student	an M.P.
an M.L.A.	an S.P.
an X-ray	an F.I.R.

Rule II

(I) Indefinite articles 'A'/'An' are used when we talk of a thing or a person that is indefinite or that is mentioned for the first time. (in the sense of 'one').

(II) Indefinite article is also used to express a class (in the sense of 'any') [Rule III (B)].

(A) Before a singular/countable common noun when it is mentioned for the first time representing no particular person or a thing. For example

(i) I need a book.	(one)
(ii) Twelve inches make a foot.	(one)
(iii) A beggar came to my door.	(one)
(iv) Please get me a scooter.	(one)
(v) She gave her a notebook.	(one)

(B) Before a singular countable noun which is used to single out some person/something as a representative of a class of things, animals and persons [Rule III (C)]. For example

(i) A cow is a useful animal.	(any in the sense of class)
(ii) A beggar cannot be a chooser.	(any in the sense of class)
(iii) A rose is a beautiful flower.	(any in the sense of class)
(iv) A son should be obedient.	(any in the sense of class)

(C) To make a common noun of a proper noun to express quality.

(i) A Shylock is living in my neighbourhood.	(a cruel miser)
(ii) He is a Vikramaditya known for his fairness.	(a just man) [Refer to Rule III (H)]

(D) In certain expressions of quantity with certain numbers and expressions of 'Price/Rate, Speed, Ratio'. For example

(i) Rupees ten a kilo.	(ii) A dozen mangoes.
(iii) Half a dozen.	[Refer to Rule III (L)]

(E) When 'A/An' represents a weakened form of preposition 'in'.

For example

- (i) He earns fifty thousand rupees a year.
- (ii) We should brush our teeth two times a day.

(F) In exclamations with 'what' or 'how' before singular countable nouns.

For example

(i) What a hot day!	(ii) What a pretty girl!
(iii) What a naughty child!	(iv) How fine a day!
(v) What a fool he is!	(vi) What kind of a teacher.
(vii) What fool will believe it? [Correct (Interrogative)]	

* But we don't say 'What a kind of'.

(G) Note the position of indefinite articles in the following adverbs : 'Rather, very, much, quite, so, too, such, as'

For example

- (i) It is rather a nuisance.
- (ii) It is rather a good step (or a rather good step).
- (iii) He is a very good person.
- (iv) He is a much hated character.
- (v) He is such a nice man that everybody likes him.
- (vi) It is quite an interesting story.
- (vii) She is as intelligent a student as her brother is.
- (viii) She is too weak a student to pass.
- (ix) She is so weak a student that she can't pass.

(H) Before a person not known to the speaker. For example

- (i) A Mr. Gupta = Some Mr. Gupta
- (ii) A Mrs. Sharma = Some Mrs. Sharma

(I) Before the verbs used as nouns. For example

- (i) For a swim
- (iii) For a visit
- (v) For a drive
- (vii) Have a taste
- (ix) Have a pain
- (ii) For a talk
- (iv) For a walk
- (vi) For a rest
- (viii) Have a mind

(J) Before certain phrases. For example

- (i) In a hurry
- (iii) Take a liking
- (v) Take a fancy
- (vii) Tell a lie
- (ii) A pity.
- (iv) Feel a shame
- (vi) Make a noise

(K) Before the words denoting numbers. For example

- (i) A hundred
- (ii) A dozen
- (iii) A million

(L) Before the adjectives 'little' and 'few' to give the sense of 'some'.

(Rule V on Adjectives)

A little – Some (Quantity)

A few – Some (Number)

- (i) I have little money to buy a house. (hardly any)
- (ii) Please give me a little sugar. (some)
- (iii) He has spent the little money that he had. (some but all)
- (iv) There are few boys in the class. (hardly anyone)
- (v) I met a few students in the university. (some)
- (vi) The few students that were in the class were sitting idle. (some but all)

(M) There is no plural of 'a', 'an'. 'Some' or 'Any' is the equivalent of the plural.

- A horse some horses/any horses
- An orange some oranges/any oranges

The Use of Definite Article 'The'

Rule III

(A) When we talk of a particular person or a thing as already mentioned, known or under discussion. For example

- (i) The book (which you mentioned) is not available in the market.
- (ii) Let us study the lesson carefully. (lesson in hand)

(B) Before proper nouns (unique objects) when they refer to the names of historical buildings, mountain ranges, planets, rivers, oceans, gulfs, groups of islands, holy books, ordinals, descriptive names of countries, states, newspapers, magazines, deserts, superlative degree, names of trains, hotels, shops. For example

The Persian Gulf	The Taj Mahal	The Netherlands
The Indian Ocean	The best picture	The Sudan
The Ganges	The first man	The USA
The Himalayas	The Sahara	The Maurya Sheraton
The Ramayana	The Bay of Bengal	The Ranjit
The Vedas	The Rajdhani Express	
The Moon	The Times of India	
The Sun	The Frontline	
The Earth	The North Pole	

NOTE 'The' is not used before **Aravali** and **Everest** because they are not mountain ranges.

(C) When a singular noun expresses a class of animal or things. However, 'the' is avoided with their plural forms and persons to express a class. For example

- (i) The dog is a faithful animal.
- (ii) The rose is a sweet flower.
- (iii) The cow is economically useful.
- (iv) Dogs are faithful.
- (v) The cows are economically useful. (Delete 'the')
- (vi) The son should be obedient. (Delete 'The', use 'A'. 'The' before a person does not express a class of persons)

(1) In the sense of 'any' to single out a person, a thing or an animal as a representative of a class. [Refer to Rule II (B)]

- (i) A son should be obedient.
- (ii) A cow is a useful animal.
- (iii) A mango is a sweet fruit.
- (iv) Sons should be obedient.

(2) 'Man/Woman/Mankind' used in general sense to represent human race are used without article. For example

- (i) Man is mortal. (Used in general sense)

(D) Before an adjective when it represents a class of persons. For example

- (i) The rich should help the poor.
- (ii) The old are respected by the young.

(E) Before musical instruments. For example

- (i) He can play the flute.
- (ii) She is fond of playing the harmonium.

(F) As an adverb with a comparative sense. (Double comparison) For example

- (i) The sooner, the better.
- (ii) The higher you go, the colder it is.

(G) Before comparative degree in case of a choice. For example

- (i) She is the weaker of the two sisters.
- (ii) Who is the more beautiful of the two sisters?

(H) Before proper noun for the sake of comparison. For example

- (i) Surdas is the Milton of India.
- (ii) Kalidas is the Shakespeare of India.

[Refer to Rule II (C)]

(I) Before sports cups and trophies. For example

- (i) India won the Singer Cup last year.
- (ii) A number of teams are taking part in the World Cup.

(J) Before physical positions. For example

- (i) The top of the mountain.
- (ii) The back of the house.
- (iii) The centre of the market.
- (iv) The front of the house.

(K) With the cardinal points. For example

- (i) The Sun rises in the East.
- (ii) The Himalayas are to the North of India.

(L) Before a unit of measurement. For example

- (i) Cloth is sold by the metre.
- (ii) Eggs are sold by the dozen.

[Refer to Rule II (D)]

(M) Before castes and communities. For example

- (i) The Rajputs are brave people.
- (ii) The Marathas are hard working.

(N) Before the adjectives 'same and whole' and after the adjectives 'all and both' used with plural nouns. For example

- (i) This is the same book that you gave me.
- (ii) The whole class was absent.
- (iii) All the boys were present there.
- (iv) Both the brothers were honest.
- (v) All sugar is wasted.

(O) In certain idiomatic phrases. For example

- (i) In the wrong.
- (ii) On the contrary.
- (iii) In the town.
- (iv) The benefit of the doubt.
- (v) In the air.
- (vi) Speak the truth.
- (vii) Out of the question.
- (viii) In the right.

(P) Before a common noun to give it the force of a superlative. For example

- (i) She is the woman.
- (ii) Netaji was the leader.
- (iii) He is the man for this job.

(Q) Before a common noun to give it the sense of an abstract noun (feelings, qualities, etc.). For example

- (i) The judge in him. *(sense of justice)*
- (ii) The mother in her. *(feelings of a mother)*
- (iii) The beast in him. *(cruelty of a beast)*

(R) Before inventions. For example

- (i) The telephone.
- (ii) The wireless.
- (iii) The television. *(as an invention)*
- (iv) He was watching the television. *('television' is used just as a set)*
- (v) He was listening to the radio.

(S) Before the name of professions used collectively. For example

- (i) The Press. (ii) The Bench.

(T) Before a noun, qualified by adjectives. For example

- (i) The former President Abdul Kalam
- (ii) The immortal Shakespeare.
- (iii) The late Shri S.C. Bose.

(U) Before the case in apposition. For example

- (i) Netaji, the hero of Modern India, ought to be remembered.
- (ii) Who can underestimate Mr. Vajpayee, the former Prime Minister?

(V) Before the dates. For example

- (i) The 10th of May. (ii) The 5th of September.

(W) Before the organs of government. For example

- (i) The Judiciary (ii) The Legislature

(X) Before the parts of a body of a person in place of possessive adjectives. For example

- (i) He hit me on the back.
- (ii) She caught me by the arm.

(Y) Before the political parties. For example

- (i) The BJP (ii) The Labour Party
- (iii) The Janta Party

(Z) (a) Before the Armed Forces. For example

- (i) The Army (ii) The Police
- (iii) The Air Force

(b) Before the dynasties, empires, wars, revolutions, centuries. For example

- (i) The Gupta Dynasty (ii) The British Empire
- (iii) The Red Revolution (iv) The Middle Ages
- (v) The Civil War (vi) The Vedic Ages
- (vii) The Sixth Century

(c) Before language to signify nationality. For example

- (i) The Chinese are hard working.
- (ii) The Japanese are patriots out and out.

(d) Before nationality (plural). For example

- (i) The Greeks
- (ii) The Indians
- (iii) The Asians

NOTE But for singular nouns, we say *An Indian, An Asian, A Greek*.

(e) Before little and few.

[Refer to Rule II (L)]

- (i) The little – some but all
- (ii) The few – some but all

Rule IV The Omission of Articles

The articles 'A/An, The' are omitted.

(A) Before proper nouns. For example

- (i) Shakespeare was the greatest dramatist.
- (ii) Delhi is the capital of India.

NOTE (a) When indefinite articles are used before proper nouns they become common nouns.

(b) 'The' before a proper noun is used for the sake of comparison. *For example*

- (i) This man is a Shylock. (a miser)
- (ii) Samudra Gupta was the Napoleon of his age.
(*The greatest General of his time.*)

(B) Before names of materials. For example

- (i) Silver is a useful metal.
- (ii) Tea grows in India.
- (iii) The tea of Assam is very famous.
- (iv) The water of the Ganga is sacred.

(particular tea)
(particular water)

(C) Before common noun used in its widest sense. For example

- (i) Man is mortal.
- (ii) God is omnipresent.
- (iii) The Gods and the Goddesses are kind to him. (in the sense of deities).

(D) Before abstract nouns as qualities, feelings and states used in general sense. For example

- (i) Truth is a noble quality.
- (ii) Love is a natural feeling.
- (iii) Honesty is the best policy.

NOTE But we can say. *For example*

- (i) The honesty of my brother is beyond any doubt.
- (ii) He always tells a lie.
- (iii) He always speaks the truth.

(E) Before noun complement. (appoint, make, elect, select, etc.) For example

- (i) The committee appointed him Captain.
- (ii) They elected him President.

(F) Before collective nouns in general sense. For example

- (i) Life is complex. (ii) Society does not allow this.

(G) Before uncountable nouns. (Refer to Rule I in the chapter on Nouns). For example

- (i) He gave me advice. (ii) He passed on information to me.

(H) Before languages. For example

- (i) Chinese is a difficult language.
 (ii) He knows Russian very well.
 (iii) He knows the Sanskrit language.

[Rule III Z(b)]

(I) Before 'school, college, home, church, temple, sea, work, bed, table, hospital, market, prison, court' when their purpose is thought of rather than the actual building/place. For example

- (i) We go to temple on Mondays. (for prayer)
 (ii) The thief went to the bed. (upto the bed)
 (iii) I go to bed early. (to sleep)
 (iv) He was sent to prison after conviction. (as a prisoner)
 (v) He went to Sea in his early youth. (as a sailor)
 (vi) He went to the Sea alone. (travel & other purposes)

NOTE 'The' is used before

'office, cinema, movie, theatre, picture, circus, station, bus stop', etc.

(J) Before 'hobbies, professions and sports'. For example

- (i) Dancing is her profession. (ii) Gardening is his hobby.

(K) Before names of diseases. For example

- (i) Cancer is a dreaded disease.
 (ii) AIDS is spreading like wild fire.

NOTE But we can say, The Measles, the Mumps, the Rickets, the Plague, the Flu.**(L) Before regular meals except when preceded by an adjective. For example**

- (i) I take breakfast at 8 a.m. (ii) You should take dinner early.
 (iii) They gave us a good breakfast. (iv) A good breakfast is necessary.
 (v) A dinner in honour of the President will be held. (in the sense of Party)

(M) Before parts of the body. For example

Liver is the largest organ of human body.

(N) Before modes of travel. For example

- (i) He will go by air.
 (ii) A journey by road is very comfortable.

(O) Before names of relations like**'Uncle, mother, father', etc. in place of possessive adjectives. For example**

- (i) Father will go to Delhi tomorrow.
 (ii) Aunt is expected any moment.

NOTE 'Father' and 'Aunt' implies 'our father' and 'our aunt'.

(P) In certain phrases. For example

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| (i) To lose heart. | (vii) Last but not least. |
| (ii) To set foot. | (viii) To catch fire. |
| (iii) To give ear. | (ix) To send word. |
| (iv) By day. | (x) In hand. |
| (v) At sunrise. | (xi) By name. |
| (vi) At home. | (xii) At last. |

(Q) Study the following phrases carefully.

- | | |
|---|---|
| (i) In summer, winter | + in the summer season. |
| (ii) From beginning to end | + from the beginning of the day to the end of the day. |
| (iii) From right to left | + keep to the left. |
| (iv) At dawn, at midday, at noon, at night, at dusk | + during the day, in the afternoon, in the evening, in the night. |
| (v) Next week (time) | – the next question (number). |
| Last week (time) | – the last question (number). |

(R) Before such nouns as

'Cattle, gentry, people', etc. When they are used in general sense.

(Refer to Rule II on Noun)

(S) Before little, few. (in negative sense).

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| (i) Little sugar | (hardly any) |
| (ii) Few students | (hardly any one) |

[Refer to Rule II (L)]

Rule V

(A) When two or more connected nouns refer to the same person or thing, the article should be used before the first noun. However, the article is used before each noun if they refer to two different persons or objects. For example

- (i) The Prime Minister and the President are visiting the town today.
(Two different persons holding two different posts.)
- (ii) The Prime Minister and President of the party is on a visit to the town today.
(One person holding two posts.)

(B) Similarly, one article before the first adjective is used when two or more adjectives qualify the same noun. For example

She is wearing a black and a white saree. (Omit 'a' before 'white')

(C) If there are two articles before ordinals, use singular noun. In the case of article before one ordinal, noun should be used in plural form. For example

- (i) The first and the second chapter are very difficult.
- (ii) The first and second chapters are very difficult.

NOTE The article is not repeated with plural nouns. Verb is in plural form in the sentences given in 'C'.

Work Book Exercise A

Direction Spot the error, if any, in the following sentences.

1. My friend always likes to travel by the air since he is a very busy man.
2. Dr. Radha Krishnan was a more famous philosopher than a politician.
3. The Manager and the Executive Director of our hotel is a very energetic person.
4. Whenever I meet him, he always makes a mention of his father.
5. Although he has undergone a very costly treatment, he has not been cured of a headache.
6. Those in hurry should realise that speed is no key to success in life.
7. God made country and man made town.
8. It is pity that he does not behave humbly with his parents and friends.
9. Being M.A. only he could not be appointed to the post of a lecturer.
10. He always takes a heavy breakfast because he generally skips lunch.
11. Please go and find out dog so that you may not lose it forever.
12. Snake we saw was very deadly though it left the kitchen quietly.
13. Tonight I shall go to the bed early because I have to leave for Mumbai at dawn tomorrow.
14. Child needs love and affection if he is to be brought up as a healthy young man.
15. It is said that elephant is vindictive by nature and never forgets his enemy.
16. It is very difficult to get a taxi at such a hour as it is already 11 p.m.
17. Do you take a sugar and if so, how much?
18. She lives in first storey of the house and she has to come down quite often.
19. He knows how to play flute; He learnt it while he was a student.
20. What nice mother she is, because she takes care of every small need of her children.

Work Book Exercise B

Direction Spot the error, if any, in the following sentences.

1. He is as a weak boy as my brother.
2. It is futile to give an advice to a person who would not listen to you.
3. 'The pride hath a fall', says the Bible.
4. She is both a virtuous and a beautiful daughter of a successful working mother.
5. He has been sent to the prison several times but has not shown any sign of improvement in his conduct.
6. He was watching the television when I called him last night.
7. Prince William is a heir to the throne of the Great Britain.
8. Tea we used to get in the Scouting Camp was never to our taste.
9. It was a so hot day that it was impossible to go out shopping.
10. I shall never forget a good deed you did to me, when I was in crisis.