

Tips for Successful Article Use

What is an article?:

English has two articles: the; a/an.

the = definite article

a/an = indefinite article

Let's read the book.

Let's read a book.



Tips on article use:

-Use “the” with something which has already been mentioned so that both the speaker and listener know what is being talked about.

A man came up to a¹ police officer and asked her a² question. The¹ police officer didn't understand the² question, so she asked the man to repeat it.

-Use “the” before superlatives and ordinal numbers.

The tallest student in the class is 2 meters tall.

Please read the fourth paragraph on page 3.

Today is the most important day in his life.

-Use “the” to refer to things that are unique.

The earth revolves around the sun once every 365 days (Kohl).

-Use “the” before musical instruments.

the piano; the violin; the saxophone; the erhu

-Use “the” in sentences or clauses where we identify a specific person or object. The context or situation makes the noun's identity clear.

Close the door;

I'm going to the library.

Use of articles with proper nouns:

-Proper nouns are names of particular people, places, and things.

John F. Kennedy; New York City; Notre Dame Cathedral

-The definite article is not used with most singular proper nouns.

X *The George and I went to a movie last night.*

J *George and I went to a movie last night.*

Exceptions:

When you want to be emphatic:

the Elizabeth Taylor

When you are actually using the name as a common noun:

the George that I introduced you to last night

Articles

-Use "the" with a surname in its plural form to refer to members in the family.
the Johnsons; the Greens

Careful!:

-Singular geographical names are very irregular with respect to article usage.
Asia; Africa; Mount Fuji; San Francisco Bay; the Crimea; the Sahara
Examples of irregularities (Kohl):

*State Street; the Empire State Building; Great Britain; the Soviet Union;
the University of Virginia; Bowling Green State University;
the United Nations (the U.N.); the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (but
"OPEC," not "the OPEC")*

--

*Adapted from:

Kohl, John R. Article Usage. 11 September 2007. Online posting. <<http://www.wecc.rpi.edu>>.

*Adapted by Xiaodong Liu for the Writing Center.

THE
LEARNING
COMMONS
BGSU.