

Articles

There are three articles in English: *the*, *a* and *an*. They precede and provide information about nouns and noun phrases (namely, about people, places, things or concepts). This handout contains some common usages, but there are many exceptions that must be noted and memorised over time.

The definite article: *the*

The can be used with singular, plural, countable, and uncountable (or mass) nouns.¹ Use *the* when referring to something specific that your audience will recognise, for example:

Nouns that have been mentioned previously, or are clearly related to something mentioned previously	The party featured a band and a catered meal. The band was excellent, but the food was gone by nine!
Cases where the context indicates clearly <i>which</i> thing is being referred to	Mum, can I borrow the car? The Prime Minister is concerned about child poverty. The results of the investigation . . .
Organisation names that contain a generic word such as organisation, commission or foundation ²	The Earthquake Commission, the Breast Cancer Foundation
Country or regional names that contain a generic word, (e.g., republic, kingdom or state/states) or have a plural form ²	The Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, the South Island, the Philippines, the State of Tasmania, the United States
Geographical features such as rivers, oceans, mountain ranges and deserts where the name includes the specific feature ²	The Rakaia River, the Pacific Ocean, the Rocky Mountains, the Sahara Desert, the Tararua Ranges
Categories or classifications	The moa (an entire species), the human brain (a type of organ/body part shared by all people)
A unique person, place or thing	The sun, the Pope, the International Space Station, the NZ dollar, the Reihana whanau (family), the internet
Ordinal numbers (first, second, etc.) and superlatives (the tallest, the best, etc.)	The first test is always the hardest.
Plural nouns preceded by "of"	Most/all/none/many of the classes were interesting.
Centuries and decades ³	The 19 th century, the 1960s

<p>Usage for some common place nouns (e.g., school, university, hospital, prison, church)</p> <p>When referring to the physical location, use <i>the</i>.</p> <p>When referring to these places in the context of someone's role there, use zero article.</p>	<p>There's a new auditorium at the school.</p> <p>I'm going to school at 7.30 today (likely to be said by a student or staff member of the school)</p>
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¹ See explanation of countable and uncountable nouns on page two.

² The underlying logic is that the audience needs to know which specific organisation, republic, or ocean, for instance, is being referred to.

³ Individual years take zero article, e.g., David Lange became Prime Minister in 1984.

Exercise 1*

Fill in the blanks with the correct article, either *a*, *an*, *the* or (where an article is not required).

“(a)____ New Zealand has (b)____ shorter human history than any other country. (c)____ precise date of settlement is (d)____ matter of debate, but current understanding is that (e)____ first arrivals came from (f)____ East Polynesia in (g)____ late 13th century. It was not until (h)____ 1642 that (i)____ Europeans became aware (j)____ country existed.

(k)____ original Polynesian settlers discovered (l)____ country on deliberate voyages of exploration, navigating by (m)____ ocean currents and (n)____ winds and stars. (o)____ navigator credited in some traditions with discovering New Zealand is Kupe. Some time later (p)____ first small groups arrived from Polynesia. Now known as M•ori, these tribes did not identify themselves by (q)____ collective name until the arrival of Europeans when, to mark their distinctiveness, (r)____ name M•ori, meaning ‘ordinary’, came into use.”**

Exercise 2

Fill in the blanks with the correct article, either *a*, *an*, *the* or (where an article is not required).

“(a)____ university education is much more than (b)____ qualification you get at (c)____ end. Adapting to life at (d)____ university is one of (e)____ most rewarding challenges you will ever face. Whatever subject you decide to study, going to university will equip you with (f)____ skills that you can apply to your academic work, your career and in your personal life.

(g)____ chance to nurture (h)____ academic passion over several years guided by (i)____ expert in that field, while simultaneously enjoying (j)____ independence, (k)____ extracurricular activities and new friends is not to be easily overlooked.”***

* Exercises adapted from Flinders University (2013). *Articles*. Retrieved from http://www.flinders.edu.au/slc_files/Documents/Yellow%20Guides/Articles.pdf.

** Wilson, J. (2005). History—M•ori arrival and settlement. *Te Ara—the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. Retrieved from <https://teara.govt.nz/en/history/page-1>.

*** Pure Potential (n.d.). *Why go to Uni?* Retrieved from <http://purepotential.org/introduction/why-go-to-uni/>.

