

# Articles (2): a/an, the or no article

1 We use a/an with singular nouns:

*He was reading a book.*

*I saw an interesting film yesterday.*

2 Look at this example:

*When I arrived, John was reading a book.*

We use a/an when it isn't necessary to make clear which particular thing we are talking about. There are lots of books; John was reading one of them.

We use a/an to talk about people's jobs:

*Jim is an engineer.* (= There are lots of engineers; Jim is one.)

We use a/an to describe things or people:

*They have a beautiful house.* (= There are lots of beautiful houses; they have one.)

*John is an old friend of mine.*

3 We use the with singular or plural nouns:

*the book the books*

We can use the with uncountable nouns (e.g. music, water, food, education):

*The water is in the fridge.*

Note:

- uncountable nouns do not have a plural (NOT two-musics, three-waters).
- we do not use a/an with uncountable nouns (NOT a-music, a-water). (See Unit 53.)

4 We use the when it is clear which person or thing we are talking about:

*Jean was reading a book. She closed the book.* (= She closed the book that she was reading.)

*Anna likes music, but she doesn't like the music that John plays.*

*Mike's gone to the shops.* (= the local shops) *She's in the kitchen.* (= the kitchen in this house)

*I must go to the bank.* (= my bank, where I keep my money)

*the centre/station/airport* (in a city)

*the River Thames* (There is only one.)

*the government in my country*

5 We do not use the before plural nouns (e.g. vegetables) or uncountable nouns (e.g. education, music) when we are talking about something in general:

*Do you like vegetables?* (= any vegetables)  
*I think education is very important.*

6 We do not use a or the before names of languages, meal names, the names of cities, most countries and most streets, and the names of airports, stations, single mountains or lakes:

*She speaks Spanish.*

*She lives in Amsterdam in Holland.* (But we say the U.S.A., the United Kingdom.)

*What time will lunch be?*

*from Heathrow Airport to Oxford Street*

## Practice

A Put a, an or the into the gaps if they are required. Leave the gaps empty if nothing is required.

► I want to put some money into my bank account, so I'm going to the..... bank this afternoon. It's in Midland Street.

1 I had ..... sandwich for ..... lunch today.

2 We flew to ..... Dublin Airport in ..... Ireland.

3 It was ..... long flight, but eventually we arrived in ..... U.S.A.

4 I'm trying to learn ..... Japanese. I'm having ..... lesson tomorrow.

5 He made ..... angry speech against ..... government.

6 She is ..... famous actress and she is appearing in ..... popular TV series.

7 They live in ..... Paris in ..... area near to ..... River Seine.

8 They've bought ..... small flat in ..... Park Street.

**B** Complete the sentences by putting in *a*, *an* or *the* if required. Leave the gap empty if nothing is required. (Note that the following words in this exercise are uncountable nouns: *music*, *fuel*, *education*, *fish*, *food*, *coffee*, *exercise*.)

► She read *the*.... letters that had arrived that morning.

- 1 It was a nice day, so we had ..... lunch in ..... garden of my house.
- 2 I'm just going to ..... shops. I'll be back in a few minutes.
- 3 We phoned for ..... taxi to take us to ..... airport.
- 4 I like listening to ..... music when I come home.
- 5 Without ..... fuel, ..... cars don't work.
- 6 John was at home. He was reading ..... magazine in ..... living-room.
- 7 His parents believe that ..... education is a very important thing.
- 8 Jane doesn't like ..... fish; she never eats it.
- 9 After ..... dinner, I washed ..... plates and glasses.
- 10 Did you like ..... food at ..... party yesterday?
- 11 A: Where's ..... coffee?  
B: It's in ..... cupboard next to ..... sink.
- 12 Doctors say that ..... exercise is good for everybody.

**C** Complete this conversation by putting in *a*, *an* or *the* if required. Leave the gap empty if nothing is required.

Mike: Is Maria (►) *a*..... student at your college?

Rosie: No, she's (1)..... old friend of mine. We were at school together.

Mike: What does she do now?

Rosie: She's (2)..... computer programmer. She's not English, you know. She comes from (3)..... Brazil, but she's living in (4)..... U.S.A. at the moment.

Mike: Has she got (5)..... job there?

Rosie: Yes, she's working for (6)..... big company there.

Mike: Do you send (7)..... emails to each other?

Rosie: Yes, and I had (8)..... long email from her yesterday.

Mike: What did she say in (9)..... email?

Rosie: She said that she was living in (10)..... nice apartment in (11)..... centre of (12)..... Chicago.

**D** Complete the story by putting *a*, *an* or *the* into the gaps.

Yesterday I was sitting on (►) *the*.... 6 o'clock train when I saw (1)..... strange man walking along the platform. He came into the carriage of (2)..... train where I was sitting, and he sat in the seat opposite mine. He opened (3)..... newspaper and started reading it. On (4)..... front page of (5)..... newspaper, there was (6)..... picture of (7)..... bank robber. The words under (8)..... picture were: 'Wanted by the police'. It was (9)..... same man!