

When NOT to use the definite article *the*.

Sometimes it's easier to remember when NOT to use something instead of trying to memorize when to use something!

Here are some situations in which you don't need to use *the*.

1. Things in general

You don't need an article when you talk about things *in general*.

The does NOT = all.

Use **plural count nouns**:

Cats are great **pets**!

You're not talking about one specific cat or one specific pet. You're talking about all cats and all pets in general.

*I love reading **books**.*

Women love it when **men** send them **flowers**!

Houses are expensive in that neighbourhood.

Americans drive big **cars**.

Use **uncountable nouns**:

*I love listening to **music**.*

You enjoy music in general, not any specific song or kind of music.

*She's afraid of **heights**, so we couldn't go to the top of the Eiffel Tower.*

*I love **chocolate**!*

*Have you eaten **lunch** yet?*

*She's a vegetarian. She doesn't eat **meat**.*

2. Names

Names of holidays, countries, companies, languages, etc. are all proper nouns. You don't need to use an article with a proper noun.

a. Holidays

*I got a beautiful new dress for **Christmas**.*

*I got my mom a necklace for **Mother's Day**.*

*Everybody wears green on **St. Patrick's Day**.*

*What are you doing on **Valentine's Day**?*

b. Geography

Articles are not used before countries, states, cities, towns, continents, single lakes, or single mountains.

*I live in **Canada**.*

***Mt. Rosa** is part of the Alps mountain range.*

Mt. Rosa is one mountain. The Alps describe a group of mountains.

*I'm going to **Europe** next month on vacation.*

***Lake Ontario** and **Lake Huron** are 2 of the Great Lakes.*

The Great Lakes are a group of lakes on the border between Canada and the US.

***Mt. Fuji** is the highest mountain in **Japan**.*

NOTE: There is an exception to every rule in English. **The** is part of the names of these countries:

the United States

the Czech Republic

the Philippines

c. Companies

*I use **Twitter** and **Facebook** every day.*

*Bill Gates founded **Microsoft**.*

***Wal-Mart** is the largest employer in the U.S.*

***McDonald's** has restaurants in 119 countries.*

d. Universities

*Her son graduated from **Harvard**.*

*She goes to **Oxford**.*

*He applied to **Cambridge**, **Yale**, and **Stanford**.*

However, if the name of the university begins with *University*, then you must use **the**:

*He has a master's degree from **the University of Toronto**.*

e. Languages

*I am studying **Russian**.*

*I speak **French**.*

*In Brazil people speak **Portuguese**.*

*I teach people how to speak **English**.*

3. Places, locations, streets

Streets, some locations, and some places do not need an article:

*I left my book at **home**.*

*I have to go to **work** early tomorrow.*

*He was found guilty of murder and sent to **jail** for life.*

*My office is located on **Main Street**.*

*I usually go to **church** on Sundays.*

*Good night everyone! I'm going to **bed**.*

*Did you go to **school** today?*

*When I was in **high school**, everyone had to study French.*

*She's studying business at **university**.*

NOTE: You don't need an article for subjects you study at school: *math, geography, business, history, science*.

Places where you DO need to use an article:

*I need to go to **the bank**.*

*Let's go to **the movies**.*

*My dad is in **the hospital**.*

*She works at **the post office**.*

What time do you have to be at **the airport**?

Please drop me off at **the bus stop**.

She doesn't like to go to **the doctor** or **the dentist**.

4. Sports

Sports and other physical activities do not need an article:

I love to go **skiing** in the winter.

I play **football** every day after school.

He loves watching **hockey** on TV.

She does **yoga** 3 times a week.

My daughter really enjoys **dancing**.

5. Noun + number

He's staying at the Hilton hotel in **room 221**.

The train to Paris leaves from **platform 2**.

My English class is in **room 6** on the first floor.

First is an adjective in this sentence. It describes *the floor*.

6. Acronyms

An **acronym** is an abbreviation (a short form) of a name. It uses the first letter of each word to form a new word.

a. If the acronym is **pronounced** as a word, don't use **the**.

NATO *ambassadors met to discuss the situation.*

NATO is the acronym used for the *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. NATO is pronounced as one word, /'neɪtəʊ/.

UNESCO *was formed in 1946.*

UNESCO is the acronym used for the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. UNESCO is pronounced as one word, /ju'neskəʊ/.

You need to use **the** before acronyms when the letters are **pronounced** individually, not as a word.

The UN was created after the Second World War.

UN is used to represent the United Nations. UN is pronounced you-N /ju'ɛn/. It is not pronounced *un* /ʌn/, like in the word *under*.

Other acronyms that need **the**:

the EU

the US

the CIA

the FBI

b. **The** is not used before university acronyms:

*John Smith got his **MBA** at **UCLA**.*

*She has a **Ph.D.** from **MIT**.*

PRACTICE:

1. ____ Second World war ended in 1945.
2. Do you know ____ people who live next door.
3. Are you interested in ____ art or ____ architecture.
4. Don't stay in that hotel. ____ beds are very uncomfortable.
5. I hate ____ violence.
6. Two of the biggest problems facing our society are ____ crime and ____ unemployment.
7. Ken's brother is in ____ prison for robbery.
8. What time do your children finish ____ school.
9. The other day the fire brigade had to go to ____ prison to put out the fire.
10. On ____ way to London we passed through a small village with ____ old church.
We stopped to visit ____ church. It was a beautiful building.

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