

# THE DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLE: USE AND OMISSION

## 1. THE INDEFINITE ARTICLE

### Use

- Before a singular noun which is countable when it is mentioned for the first time and no particular person or thing:

*"I need a book"*  
*"There is a policeman at the door"*

- Before a singular countable noun which is used as an example of a class of things.

*"A child needs love"*

- With names of professions:

*"She is a teacher"*

- In expressions of price, speed, time...

*"5p. a kilo"*  
*"Four times a day"*  
*"60 km an hour"*

- In exclamations before singular countable nouns:

*"What a day!"*  
*"What a pretty girl!"*

### Omission

- Before plural nouns: the indefinite article has no plural form. We use **SOME** (unos, algunos)
- Before uncountable nouns:

*Sugar, wine, milk, cheese, news, information...*

- Before abstract nouns (except when they are used in a particular sense)

*"He was pale with fear"*  
*"Some children suffer from a fear of the dark"*

- Before names of meals, except when preceded by an adjective:

*"We have breakfast at eight"*  
*"He gave us a good breakfast"*

- The article is also used when it is a special meal given to celebrate something or in someone's honour.

*"I was invited to a dinner given to welcome her"*

## 2. THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

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### Use

- Before nouns of which there is only one or which are considered as one:

*the Earth, the sky, the sun, the weather...*

- Before a noun which has become definite as a result of being mentioned a second time:

*"His car struck a tree. You could still the mark of the tree."*

- Before a noun which by reason of locality can only represent one thing:

*"Ann is in the garden"*  
*"Pass me the salt, please"*

- *The + singular noun* can represent a class of animals or things:

*"The whale is in danger of becoming extinct"*  
*"The washing-machine has made life easier for housewives"*

- *The + adjective* represents as a class of people:

*"The old" (old people in general)*

- Before certain nouns of seas, rivers, groups of islands, chains of mountains, plural nouns of countries, deserts.

*The Artic / The Alps / The Sahara / The USA*

- **The** is also used before noun + of + noun:

*The Cape of Good Hope*

*The Gulf of Mexico.*

- Before names of musical instruments:

*"She learnt to play the piano...*

*...the flute"*

## Omission

- Before names of places (except the ones mentioned above)
- Before abstract nouns except when they are used in a particular sense:

*"Men fear death"*

*"The death of the Prime Minister"*

- Before names of meals
- Before indefinite plural nouns

*" Women are expected to like housework"*

*"Big hotels all over the world"*

- Before **Home**
- Before **Chapel, church, market, college, school, hospital, court, prison, work, sea**, when they are visited or used for their primary purpose. When these places are used for other reasons the definite article is used.