

## Countable nouns with a/an and some

**A**

Countable nouns can be *singular* or *plural*:

a <b>dog</b>	a <b>child</b>	the <b>evening</b>	this <b>party</b>	an <b>umbrella</b>
<b>dogs</b>	some <b>children</b>	the <b>evenings</b>	these <b>parties</b>	two <b>umbrellas</b>

Before singular countable nouns you can use **a/an**:

- Bye! Have a nice **evening**.
- Do you need **an umbrella**?

You cannot use singular countable nouns alone (without **a/the/my** etc.):

- She never wears **a** hat. (*not* She never wears hat)
- Be careful of **the** dog. (*not* Be careful of dog)
- What **a** beautiful day!
- I've got **a** headache.

**B**

We use **a/an** ... to say what kind of thing something is, or what kind of person somebody is:

- That's a **nice table**.

In the plural we use the noun alone (*not* some ...):

- Those are **nice chairs**. (*not* some nice chairs)

Compare singular and plural:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A dog is <b>an animal</b> .           | <input type="checkbox"/> Dogs are <b>animals</b> .                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'm <b>an optimist</b> .              | <input type="checkbox"/> We're <b>optimists</b> .                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tom's father is <b>a doctor</b> .     | <input type="checkbox"/> Most of my friends are <b>students</b> .       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Are you <b>a good driver</b> ?        | <input type="checkbox"/> Are they <b>good students</b> ?                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jane is <b>a really nice person</b> . | <input type="checkbox"/> Jane's parents are <b>really nice people</b> . |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What <b>a lovely dress</b> !          | <input type="checkbox"/> What <b>awful shoes</b> !                      |

We say that somebody has **a long nose** / **a nice face** / **blue eyes** / **small hands** etc. :

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jack has <b>a long nose</b> .<br>( <i>not</i> the long nose) | <input type="checkbox"/> Jack has <b>blue eyes</b> .<br>( <i>not</i> the blue eyes) |
|---|---|

Remember to use **a/an** when you say what somebody's job is:

- Sandra is **a nurse**. (*not* Sandra is nurse)
- Would you like to be **an English teacher**?

**C**

You can use **some** with plural countable nouns. We use **some** in two ways.

(1) **Some** = a number of / a few of / a pair of:

- I've seen **some** good **movies** recently. (*not* I've seen good movies)
- Some friends** of mine are coming to stay at the weekend.
- I need **some** new **sunglasses**. (= a new pair of sunglasses)

Do not use **some** when you are talking about things in general (see Unit 75):

- I love **bananas**. (*not* some bananas)
- My aunt is a writer. She writes **books**. (*not* some books)

(2) **Some** = some but not all:

- Some children** learn very quickly. (but not all children)
- Tomorrow there will be rain in **some places**, but most of the country will be dry.

## Exercises

**71.1** What are these things? Use a dictionary if necessary.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 an ant? <i>It's an insect.</i>         | 7 Earth, Mars, Venus and Jupiter?           |
| 2 ants and bees? <i>They're insects.</i> | .....                                       |
| 3 a cauliflower? .....                   | 8 a tulip? .....                            |
| 4 chess? .....                           | 9 the Nile, the Rhine and the Mekong? ..... |
| 5 a pigeon, an eagle and a crow? .....   | 10 a violin, a trumpet and a flute? .....   |
| 6 a skyscraper? .....                    | .....                                       |

Who were these people?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 11 Beethoven? <i>He was a composer.</i>   | 15 Marilyn Monroe?                        |
| 12 Shakespeare? .....                     | .....                                     |
| 13 Albert Einstein? .....                 | 16 Michael Jackson and John Lennon? ..... |
| .....                                     | .....                                     |
| 14 Washington, Lincoln and Kennedy? ..... | 17 Van Gogh, Renoir and Picasso? .....    |
| .....                                     | .....                                     |

**71.2** Read about what these people do, and say what their jobs are. Choose from:

<b>chef</b>	<b>interpreter</b>	<b>journalist</b>	<del><b>nurse</b></del>
<b>plumber</b>	<b>surgeon</b>	<b>tour guide</b>	<b>waiter</b>

- Sarah looks after patients in hospital. *She's a nurse.*
- Gary works in a restaurant. He brings the food to the tables. He .....
- Jane writes articles for a newspaper. ....
- Kevin works in a hospital. He operates on people. ....
- Jonathan cooks in a restaurant. ....
- Dave installs and repairs water pipes. ....
- Martina takes visitors round her city and tells them about it. She .....
- Lisa translates what people are saying from one language into another so that they can understand each other. ....

**71.3** Put in **a/an** or **some** where necessary. If no word is necessary, leave the space empty.

- I've seen *some* good films recently.
- What's wrong with you? Have you got *a* headache?
- I know a lot of people. Most of them are *—* students.
- When I was *—* child, I used to be very shy.
- Would you like to be *—* actor?
- Questions, questions, questions! You're always asking *—* questions!
- What *—* beautiful garden!
- birds, for example the penguin, cannot fly.
- Do you like staying in *—* hotels?
- I've been walking for three hours. I've got *—* sore feet.
- I don't feel very well this morning. I've got *—* sore throat.
- Maria speaks *—* English, but not very much.
- It's a shame we don't have *—* camera. I'd like to take *—* picture of that house.
- Those are *—* nice shoes. Where did you get them?
- I'm going shopping. I want to buy *—* new shoes.
- You need *—* visa to visit *—* countries, but not all of them.
- Jane is *—* teacher. Her parents were *—* teachers too.
- I don't believe him. He's *—* liar. He's always telling *—* lies.

A

Study this example:

I had **a sandwich** and **an apple** for lunch.

**The sandwich** wasn't very good, but **the apple** was nice.



Joe says 'a sandwich', 'an apple' because this is the first time he talks about them.

Joe now says 'the sandwich', 'the apple' because Karen knows which sandwich and which apple he means – **the** sandwich and **the** apple that he had for lunch.

Compare **a** and **the** in these examples:

- A man** and **a woman** were sitting opposite me. **The man** was American, but I think **the woman** was British.
- When we were on holiday, we stayed at **a hotel**. Sometimes we ate at **the hotel** and sometimes we went to **a restaurant**.

B

We use **the** when we are thinking of a specific thing. Compare **a/an** and **the**:

- Tim sat down on **a chair**. (perhaps one of many chairs in the room)  
Tim sat down on **the chair nearest the door**. (a specific chair)
- Paula is looking for **a job**. (not a specific job)  
Did Paula get **the job she applied for**? (a specific job)
- Do you have **a car**? (not a specific car)  
I cleaned **the car** yesterday. (= my car)

C

We use **the** when it is clear in the situation which thing or person we mean. For example, in a room we talk about **the light** / **the floor** / **the ceiling** / **the door** / **the carpet** etc. :

- Can you turn off **the light**, please? (= the light in this room)
- I took a taxi to **the station**. (= the station in that town)
- (*in a shop*) I'd like to speak to **the manager**, please. (= the manager of this shop)

In the same way, we say (go to) **the bank** / **the post office**:

- I have to go to **the bank** and then I'm going to **the post office**.  
(The speaker is usually thinking of a specific bank or post office.)

We also say (go to) **the doctor** / **the dentist**:

- Clare isn't very well. She's gone to **the doctor**. (= her usual doctor)
- I don't like going to **the dentist**.

Compare **the** and **a**:

- I have to go to **the bank** today.  
Is there **a bank** near here?
- I don't like going to **the dentist**.  
My sister is **a dentist**.

D

We say 'once **a week** / three times **a day** / £1.50 **a kilo**' etc. :

- 'How often do you go to the cinema?' 'About once **a month**.'
- 'How much are those potatoes?' '£1.50 **a kilo**.'
- Helen works eight hours **a day**, six days **a week**.

# Exercises

## 72.1 Put in a/an or the.

- This morning I bought a newspaper and \_\_\_\_\_ magazine. \_\_\_\_\_ newspaper is in my bag, but I can't remember where I put \_\_\_\_\_ magazine.
- I saw \_\_\_\_\_ accident this morning. \_\_\_\_\_ car crashed into \_\_\_\_\_ tree. \_\_\_\_\_ driver of \_\_\_\_\_ car wasn't hurt, but \_\_\_\_\_ car was badly damaged.
- There are two cars parked outside: \_\_\_\_\_ blue one and \_\_\_\_\_ grey one. \_\_\_\_\_ blue one belongs to my neighbours; I don't know who \_\_\_\_\_ owner of \_\_\_\_\_ grey one is.
- My friends live in \_\_\_\_\_ old house in \_\_\_\_\_ small village. There is \_\_\_\_\_ beautiful garden behind \_\_\_\_\_ house. I would like to have \_\_\_\_\_ garden like that.

## 72.2 Put in a/an or the.

- This house is very nice. Has it got \_\_\_\_\_ garden?
  - It's a beautiful day. Let's sit in \_\_\_\_\_ garden.
  - I like living in this house, but it's a shame that \_\_\_\_\_ garden is so small.
- Can you recommend \_\_\_\_\_ good restaurant?
  - We had dinner in \_\_\_\_\_ very nice restaurant.
  - We had dinner in \_\_\_\_\_ best restaurant in town.
- She has \_\_\_\_\_ French name, but in fact she's English, not French.
  - What's \_\_\_\_\_ name of that man we met yesterday?
  - We stayed at a very nice hotel – I can't remember \_\_\_\_\_ name now.
- There isn't \_\_\_\_\_ airport near where I live. \_\_\_\_\_ nearest airport is 70 miles away.
  - Our flight was delayed. We had to wait at \_\_\_\_\_ airport for three hours.
  - Excuse me, please. Can you tell me how to get to \_\_\_\_\_ airport?
- 'Are you going away next week?' 'No, \_\_\_\_\_ week after next.'
  - I'm going away for \_\_\_\_\_ week in September.
  - Gary has a part-time job. He works three mornings \_\_\_\_\_ week.

## 72.3 Put in a/an or the where necessary.

- |    |  |                                 |
|----|--|---------------------------------|
| 1  | Would you like <u>apple</u> ?                        | <u>Would you like an apple?</u> |
| 2  | How often do you go to dentist?                      | .....                           |
| 3  | Could you close door, please?                        | .....                           |
| 4  | I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do that. It was mistake. | .....                           |
| 5  | Excuse me, where is bus station, please?             | .....                           |
| 6  | I have problem. Can you help me?                     | .....                           |
| 7  | I'm just going to post office. I won't be long.      | .....                           |
| 8  | There were no chairs, so we sat on floor             | .....                           |
| 9  | Have you finished with book I lent you?              | .....                           |
| 10 | My sister has just got job in bank in Zurich.        | .....                           |
| 11 | We live in small apartment in city centre.           | .....                           |
| 12 | There's supermarket at end of street I live in.      | .....                           |

## 72.4 Answer these questions about yourself. Where possible, use the structure in Section D (once a week / three times a day etc.).

- How often do you go to the cinema? Three or four times a year.
- How often do you go to the cinema? .....
- How often do you go away on holiday? .....
- What's the usual speed limit in towns in your country? .....
- How much sleep do you need? .....
- How often do you go out in the evening? .....
- How much television do you watch (on average)? .....
- How much does it cost to rent a small car in your country? .....