

83 A/an and the (1)

A Introduction

Read this true story about an American tourist in Britain.

A man from California was spending a month in Britain. One day he booked into a hotel in Cheltenham, a nice old town in the West of England. Then he went out to look around the place. But the man didn't return to the hotel. He disappeared, leaving a suitcase full of clothes behind. The police were called in, but they were unable to find out what had happened to the missing tourist. It was a mystery. But two weeks later the man walked into the police station in Cheltenham. He explained that he was very sorry, but while walking around the town, he had got lost. He had also forgotten the name of the hotel he had booked into. So he had decided to continue with his tour of the country and had gone to visit a friend in Scotland before returning to pick up the case he had left behind.

A/an goes only with a singular noun. With a plural or an uncountable noun we use **some**.
He left a case, (singular) *He left some cases,*
(plural) *He left some luggage,* (uncountable)

The goes with both singular and plural nouns and with uncountable nouns.

He needed the case, (singular)
He needed the cases, (plural)
He needed the luggage, (uncountable)

B Use

When the story first mentions something, the noun has **a** or **an**.

A man booked into a hotel in Cheltenham.

These phrases are new information. We do not know which man or which hotel. But when the same thing is mentioned again, the noun has **the**.

The man didn't return to the hotel.

These phrases are old information. Now we know which man and which hotel - the ones already mentioned earlier in the story. We use **the** when it is clear which one we mean.

A/AN

Would you like to see a show?
(I don't say which show.)
The cyclist was hit by a car.
(I don't say which car.)
In the office a phone was ringing.
(The office has lots of phones.)
Has Melanie got a garden?
(We do not know if there is one.)
The train stopped at a station.
(We don't know which station.)
We took a taxi.
We could hear a noise.
I wrote the number on an envelope.

THE

Would you like to see the show?
(= the show we already mentioned)
Whose is the car outside?
(‘Outside’ explains which car I mean.)
I was in bed when the phone rang.
{— the phone in my house)
She was at home in the garden.
(We know she has one.)
Turn left here for the station.
(= the station in this town)
We went in the car. (= my/our car)
We could hear the noise of a party.
I wrote it on the back of an envelope.

C A man/he and the man/someone

We use **a/an** + noun or **someone/something** when we aren't saying which one.

A man/Someone booked into a hotel.
He left a case/something behind.

We use **the** + noun or **he/she/it** when we know which one.

The man/He didn't return to the hotel.
The case/It contained clothes.

83 Exercises

1 The use of a/an and the (A-C)

Complete this true story. Put in *a/an* or *the*.

(► A man decided to rob (1) bank in the town where he lived. He walked into (2) bank and handed (3) note to one of (4) cashiers. (5) cashier read (6) note, which told her to give (7) man some money. Afraid that he might have (8) gun, she did as she was told. (9) man then walked out of (10) building, leaving (11) note behind. However, he had no time to spend (12) money because he was arrested (13) same day. He had made (14) mistake. He had written (15) note on (16) back of (17) envelope. And on (18) other side of (19) envelope was his name and address. This clue was quite *enough for* (20) detectives on the case.

2 A man/he and the man/someone (C)

Replace the sentences which contain an underlined word. Use *a/an* or *the* with the word in brackets.

- We didn't have much time for lunch. David made something for us. (omelette)
David made an omelette for us.
- 1 They ran the race before they held the long jump. Matthew won it easily, (race)
 - 2 The driver turned left. Suddenly someone ran into the road, (child)
 - 3 Vicky was lying on the sofa. She was watching something on television, (film)
 - 4 I had to take a train and then a bus. It was half an hour late, (bus)
 - 5 A shoplifter tried to steal some clothes. The camera videoed her, (thief)

3 The use of a/an and the (A-C)

Complete the conversations. Put in *a/an* or *the*.

- Laura: Look outside. *The* sky is getting very dark.
Trevor: I hope there isn't going to be *a* storm.
- 1 Mike: I'm going out for walk. Have you seen my shoes?
Harriet: Yes, they're on floor in kitchen.
 - 2 Melanie: Would you like tomato? There's one in fridge.
David: Oh, yes, please. I'll make myself cheese and tomato sandwich.
 - 3 Sarah: If you're going into city centre, can you post these letters for me?
Mark: Yes, I'll take them to main post office.
 - 4 Rita: I've got problem with my phone bill. Can I see someone about it?
Receptionist: Yes, go to fifth floor lift is along the corridor.
 - 5 Tom: I didn't know Melanie had dog.
David: It isn't hers. She's just taking it for a walk while owner is away.
 - 6 Vicky: I've got headache. I've had it all day.
Rachel: Why don't you go to health centre? It's open until six.
 - 7 Andrew: Guess what. I found £50 note on the pavement this morning.
Jessica: You really ought to take it to police station, you know.

84 A/an and the (2)

A Introduction

We use **a/an** and **the** when we aren't saying which one, and we use **the** when we know which one.

*A tourist arrived in Cheltenham to look around **the town**.*

Look again at the story and the examples in Unit 83.

B The sun, etc

When there is only one of the things we are talking about, we use **the**.

***The sun** was going down. **The government** is unpopular.*

*A drive in **the country** would be nice. We shouldn't pollute **the environment**.*

Normally there is only one sun or one government in the context. We mean the government of our country and the sun in our solar system.

We normally say: **the country(side), the earth, the environment, the government, the moon, the ozone layer, the Prime Minister, the sea(side), the sky, the sun, the weather**

We also use **the** with **cinema, theatre** and **(news)paper**.

*Do you often go to **the cinema**? I read about the accident **in the paper**.*

Note that we say **a/the police officer** but **the police**.

***A police officer** came to the hotel. NOT ~~A police came to the hotel.~~ **The police** came to the hotel. (= one or more police officers)*

C A nice day, etc

A phrase which describes something has a/an.

*It was **a lovely day**. Cheltenham is **a nice old town**.*

*It's **a big hotel**. This is **a better photo**.*

But we use **the** with a superlative.

*It's **the biggest hotel** in town. This is **the best photo**.*

We also use **a/an** to classify something, to say what kind of thing it is.

*The play was **a comedy**. The man's disappearance was **a mystery**.*

We use **a/an** to say what someone's job is.

*My sister is **a secretary**. Nick is **a car salesman**.*

D A or an?

The choice of **a** or **an** and the pronunciation of **the** depend on the next sound.

a or the + consonant sound

a cup** **the cup

a poster** **the poster

***a shop** etc*

a boiled egg

a record

an or the + vowel sound

an aspirin** **the aspirin

an egg** **the egg

***an Indian** etc*

an old photo

an umbrella

It is the sound of the next word that matters, not the spelling.

a one-way street

a uniform

a holiday

a U-turn

an open door

an uncle

an hour

an MP

84 Exercises

The sun, etc (A-B)

Complete these sentences about pollution and the environment. Put in *a/an* or *the*. ►

There was *a* programme on television about dangers to *the* environment.

- 1 There was also article about pollution in paper.
- 2 ozone layer will continue to disappear if we don't find way to stop it.
- 3 world's weather is changing. Pollution is having effect on our climate.
- 4 Last week oil tanker spilled oil into sea, damaging wildlife.
- 5 Some professors have signed letter of protest and have sent it to government.
- 6 If earth was human being, it would be in hospital.

2 The use of a/an and the (A-C)

Complete the

conversations. Put in *a/an* or *the*.

- David: How was your trip to *the* coast?
Trevor: Wonderful. *The* sun shone all day. We had *a* great time.
- 1 Henry: Would you like cigarette?
Nick: No, thanks. I've given up smoking. It's bad habit.
- 2 Sarah: What's your brother doing now? Has he got good job?
Laura: Yes, he's soldier. He's in army. He loves it.
- 3 Rita: It's great life, he says.
Harriet: I went to see Doctor Pascoe yesterday. She's best doctor I've ever had.
- 4 Rachel: She's very nice, isn't she? You couldn't meet nicer person.
Vicky: You were long time at supermarket.
- 5 Mark: Yes, I know. There was enormous queue. I was thinking of complaining to manager.
Sarah: Why were you late for your meeting?
Well, first I had to go to hotel I'd booked into. I took taxi from airport, and driver got completely lost. It was terrible nuisance man was complete idiot.
- 6 Matthew: Is this book you were telling me about?
Emma: Yes, it's really interesting story.
Matthew: What did you say it's about?
Emma: I knew you weren't listening to me. It's science fiction story. It's about beginning of universe.

3 A or an? (D)

Put in the abbreviations with *a* or *an*.

- ? a Personal Assistant *a PA*
? a National Broadcasting Company reporter *an NBC reporter*
- 1 a Disc Jockey
 - 2 a Very Important Person
 - 3 an Irish Republican Army member
 - 4 a Personal Computer
 - 5 a Los Angeles suburb
 - 6 an Unidentified Flying Object
 - 7 an Annual General Meeting
 - 8 a Member of Parliament

85 A/an, one and some

A A/an and some

Look at this example.

*Trevor has found **some money** in his old trousers.*

*There's **a note** and **some coins**.*

We use **a/an** with a singular noun and **some** with a plural or an uncountable noun (see D).

A + singular noun: **a note**

Some + plural noun: **some coins**

Some + uncountable noun: **some money**

B A/an and one

A/an and **one** both refer to one thing. Using **one** puts more emphasis on the number.

*Henry gave the taxi driver **a note**, (not a coin) Henry gave the taxi driver **one note**, (not two)*

We use **one** (not **a/an**) when we mean one of a larger number.

***One question/One of the questions in the exam** was more difficult than the others. The team wasn't at full strength. **One player/One of the players** was injured.*

C A dog = all dogs

We often use a plural noun on its own to express a general meaning (see Unit 86).

***Dogs** make wonderful pets. **Oranges** contain vitamin C.*

Here **dogs** means all dogs, dogs in general.

These sentences with **a/an** express the same general meaning.

***A dog** makes a wonderful pet. **An orange** contains vitamin C.*

***A butcher** is someone who sells meat. **A video recorder** costs about £300.*

A dog here is less usual than the structure with **dogs**, but we often use **a/an** when explaining the meaning of a word, e.g. **a butcher**.

D Some

Some with a plural noun means 'a number of', and **some** with an uncountable noun means 'an amount of'.

*Claire took **some photos**. We went out with **some friends**.*

*Henry bought **some flowers**. I had **some chips** with my steak.*

*Can you lend me **some money**? Andrew is doing **some work**.*

*Let's play **some music**. There's **some milk** in the fridge.*

Claire took some photos means that she took a number of photos, although we may not know the exact number.

We do not use **some** when we are describing something or saying what kind of thing it is.

*Vicky has **blue eyes**. Is this **salt** or **sugar**?*

*These are **marvellous photos**. Those people are **tourists**.*

Compare these sentences.

*I had **some chips** with my steak, (a number of chips)*

*I had **chips** with my steak, (chips, not potatoes or rice)*

85 Exercises

i A/an and some (A)

Paul has painted some pictures for a competition. Say what is in the pictures. Use *a* or *some* with these words: *birds, cat, fish, flowers, fruit, luggage, people*

- ? *some people*
 ? *a fish*
 1
 2
 3
 4
 5 ..



2 A/an and one (B)

Put in *a/an* or *one*.

- Have you only got *one* bedroom? I thought you had two.
 1 Melanie wanted something to drink. She was looking for cafe.
 2 It was Sunday..... shop was open, but all the others were closed.
 3 of these photos is of you. Would you like it?
 4 Shall I take photo of you two together?

3 Adog = all dogs (C)

Match each word with the right explanation and write sentences with *a/an*.

- | | | | |
|--------|--------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| carrot | line of people | ► | <i>A carrot is a vegetable.</i> |
| violin | book of maps | 1 | |
| queue | vegetable | 2 | |
| atlas | tool for digging | 3 | |
| spade | musical instrument | 4 | |

4 Some (D)

What would you say in these situations? Use a noun and decide if you need *some* or not.

- ? You and your friend would like a game of cards, but neither of you has a pack.
 We need *some cards*.
 ? You are describing Rachel to someone. Rachel's hair is dark.
 Rachel has *dark hair*.
 1 You are eating nuts. Offer them to your friend.
 Would you like.....?
 2 You want a drink of mineral water. There's a jug on the table, but you don't know what's in it.
 Is there in this jug?
 3 You've come home from a shopping trip with a few clothes. Tell your friend.
 I've bought
 4 You are eating some bread that Melanie baked. It's lovely.
 Melanie, this is
 5 The two women who live next door to you are both studying at the university.
 Tell your visitor. The women next door are