Parts of Speech

Learning Centre

Articles

There are three words known as articles. These words are “a”, “an”, and “the”.

The definite article (the) is used when referring to a particular noun. If I use a definite article, it is clear what I am referring to. There's only one possibility.

Examples: Please bring me the newspaper.
I say “the” newspaper because I think you know which newspaper I want.

What happened to the apples in the fridge?
I say “the” apples because I’m telling you which apples I mean: I mean apples that were in the fridge.
I say “the” fridge because there’s usually only one fridge in a house, and I mean that one.

I used the apples to make some pies.
I say “the” apples because we were just talking about apples, and I mean those apples.

When we want to use a definite article with a plural noun, we still use “the”.

The indefinite articles (a, an) are used when referring to any singular noun. If the word right after the article begins with a consonant sound, the article used is “a”, but if the word following begins with a vowel sound, the article “an” is used. If I use a sentence with a definite article, I don’t mean any particular thing. This may be because I don’t expect you to know what I’m talking about already, or I’m talking about something in general. The words “a” and “an” can also mean “one”.

Examples: Please bring me a newspaper.
I say “a” newspaper because it doesn’t matter which newspaper you bring me.
I say “a” instead of “an” because “newspaper” starts with a consonant sound.

There’s a rotten apple in our fridge.
I say “a rotten apple” because I don’t think you know what apple I mean.

An apple has seeds inside it.
I say “an apple” because I’m talking about apples in general. Any apple will have seeds inside it.
I say “an” instead of “a” because “apple” starts with a vowel sound.
I’ll meet you in an hour.
I say “an hour” because I mean one hour.
I say “an” instead of “a” because “hour” starts with a vowel sound (even though it starts with a consonant letter!).

When we use an indefinite article with a plural noun, we don’t use any article:

Apples have seeds inside them.

**EXERCISES:**

A. Circle the **indefinite** articles and underline the **definite** articles.

**Example:**

I saw a young man on the freeway driving an old car.

1) Did you see an old lady by the lake?
2) The bowl of soup was spilled over one of the customers sitting at a little table by the window.
3) An orange and a banana were found at the scene of the crime.
4) At the time of her wedding, she wore an old pair of gloves, a new pair of shoes, the necklace belonging to her grandmother, and a blue orchid in her hair.

B. Fill in each blank with a or an.

**Example:**

___ a ___ true friend

1) _____ brilliant idea
2) _____ honest politician
3) _____ unique opportunity
4) _____ open door

**SOLUTIONS**

A. 1) an old, the lake  2) The bowl, the customers, a little, the window  3) An orange, a banana, the scene, the crime  4) the time, an old, a new, the necklace, a blue

B. 1) a  2) an  3) a  4) an