

**** Articles**

Basic Article Usage

1. Using A or Ø: Generic Nouns

Function: generalizations

Singular Count nouns (a) **A** banana is yellow.

Plural Count Nouns (b) **Ø** Bananas are yellow.

Noncount Nouns (c) **Ø** Fruit is good for you.

A speaker uses generic nouns to make generalizations. A generic noun represents a whole class of things; it is not a specific, real, or concrete thing but rather *a symbol of a whole group*.

In (a) and (b): The speaker is talking about any banana, all bananas, bananas in general. In (c), the speaker is talking about any fruit and all fruit, fruit in general.

Notice that no article (**Ø**) is used to make generalizations with plural count nouns and noncount nouns, as in (b) and (c).

2. Using A or Some: Indefinite Nouns

Function: Real but unspecific

Singular Count nouns (d) I ate a cookie.

Plural Count Nouns (e) I ate some cookies.

Noncount Nouns (f) I ate some fruit.

Indefinite nouns are actual things (not symbols), but they are not specifically identified. In (d): The speaker is not referring to “this cookie”. The speaker is simply saying that he or she ate one cookie. The listener does not know nor need to know which specific cookie was eaten; it was simply one cookie out of that group of things in this world called ‘cookies’.

In (e) and (f): **Some** is often used with indefinite plural count nouns and indefinite noncount nouns. In addition to some, a speaker might use **two**, **a few**, **several**, **a lot**, etc. with plural count nouns, or **a little**, **a lot of** , etc. with noncount nouns.

3. Using The: Definite Nouns

Function: Real & Specific

Singular Count nouns (g) Thank you for the cookie.

Plural Count Nouns (h) Thank you for the cookies.

Noncount Nouns (i) Thank you for the fruit.

A noun is definite when both the speaker and the listener are thinking about the same specific thing.

In (g): The speaker uses **the** because the listener knows which specific cookie the speaker is talking about. i.e., that particular cookie which the listener gave to the speaker.

Notice that **the** is used with both singular and plural count nouns and with noncount nouns.

****** Please note that there are a number of special generic noun groups that can use **the** in the same way as previously discussed in the first section about generic nouns.

Here is a list of some of these word groups: ***inventions, musical instruments, organs of the body, animals***. Words in these groups sometimes use **the** to identify and introduce a point of discussion.

E.g., **The** computer is a machine that can produce calculations very quickly.

The guitar is a stringed instrument that has evolved over a very long period of time.

The human brain is an incredibly complex structure.

It has been shown that **the** average dog is much more intelligent than previously believed.

The important point with these examples is that **the** is not being used to describe specific things. Instead, it is being used to identify generic symbols of things that the listener should be able to understand.