

## A OR AN

**107.** The choice between *a* and *an* is determined by *sound*. Before a word beginning with a vowel sound *an* is used; as,

*An* ass, *an* enemy, *an* ink-pad, *an* orange, *an* umbrella, *an* hour, *an* honest man, *an* heir.

It will be noticed that the words *hour*, *honest*, *heir* begin with a vowel sound, as the initial consonant *h* is not pronounced.

**108.** Before a word beginning with a consonant sound *a* is used; as,

*A* boy, *a* reindeer, *a* woman, *a* yard, *a* horse, *a* hole,  
also *a* university, *a* union, *a* European, *a* ewe, *a* unicorn, *a* useful article.

because these words (*university*, *union*, etc.) begin with a consonant sound, that of *yu*. Similarly we say,

*A* one-rupee note, such *a* one, *a* one-eyed man.

because *one* begins with the consonant sound of *w*.

**109.** Some native speakers use *an* before words beginning with *h* if the first syllable is not stressed.

*An* hotel (More common : *a* hotel)

*an* historical novel (More common : *a* historical novel)

## USE OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

**110.** The Definite Article *the* is used—

(1) When we talk about a particular person or thing, or one already referred to (that is, when it is clear from the context which one we mean); as,

*The* book you want is out of print. (Which book ? The one you want.)

Let's go to *the* park. (= the park in this town)

*The* girl cried. (*the* girl = the girl already talked about)

(2) When a *singular* noun is meant to represent a whole class; as,

*The* cow is a useful animal.

[Or we may say, "Cows are useful animals."]

*The* horse is a noble animal.

*The* cat loves comfort.

*The* rose is the sweetest of all flowers.

*The* banyan is a kind of fig tree.

[Do not say, "a kind of a fig tree". This is a common error.]

The two nouns *man* and *woman* can be used in a general sense without either article.

*Man* is the only animal that uses fire.

*Woman* is man's mate.

But in present-day English *a man* and *a woman* (or *men* and *women*) are more usual.

*A woman* is more sensitive than *a man*.

(3) Before some proper names, viz., these kinds of place-names :

- (a) oceans and seas, e.g. *the Pacific, the Black Sea*
- (b) rivers, e.g. *the Ganga, the Nile*
- (c) canals, e.g. *the Suez Canal*
- (d) deserts, e.g. *the Sahara*
- (e) groups of islands, e.g. *the West Indies*
- (f) mountain-ranges, e.g. *the Himalayas, the Alps*
- (g) a very few names of countries, which include words like *republic* and *kingdom* (e.g. *the Irish Republic, the United Kingdom*) also: *the Ukraine, the Netherlands* (and its seat of government *the Hague*)

(4) Before the names of certain books; as,

*The Vedas, the Puranas, the Iliad, the Ramayana.*

But we say—

Homer's *Iliad*, Valmiki's *Ramayana*.

(5) Before names of things unique of their kind; as,

*The sun, the sky, the ocean, the sea, the earth.*

**Note**—Sometimes *the* is placed before a Common noun to give it the meaning of an Abstract noun; as,

At last *the warrior* (the warlike or martial spirit) in him was thoroughly aroused.

(6) Before a Proper noun when it is qualified by an adjective or a defining adjectival clause; as,

*The great Caesar : the immortal Shakespeare.*

*The Mr. Roy whom you met last night is my uncle.*

(7) With Superlatives ; as,

*The darkest cloud has a silver lining.*

This is *the best* book of elementary chemistry.

(8) With ordinals; as,

He was *the first* man to arrive.

*The ninth* chapter of the book is very interesting.

(9) Before musical instruments; as,

He can play *the flute*.

(10) Before an adjective when the noun is understood; as,

*The poor* are always with us.

(11) Before a noun (with emphasis) to give the force of a Superlative; as,

*The Verb is the word* (= the chief word) in a sentence.

(12) As an Adverb with Comparatives; as,

*The more the merrier.*

(= *by how much more, by so much the merrier*)

*The more they get, the more they want.*

## USE OF THE INDEFINITE ARTICLE

111. The Indefinite Article is used—

(1) In its original numerical sense of *one*; as,

Twelve inches make *a* foot.

Not *a* word was said.

*A* word to the wise is sufficient.

*A* bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

(2) In the vague sense of *a certain*; as,

*A* Kishore Kumar (= a certain person named Kishore Kumar) is suspected by the police.

One evening *a* beggar came to my door.

(3) In the sense of *any*, to single out an individual as the representative of a class; as,

A pupil should obey his teacher.

A cow is a useful animal.

(4) To make a common noun of a proper noun; as,

A Daniel come to judgement ! (A Daniel = a very wise man)

## OMISSION OF THE ARTICLE

112. The Article is omitted—

(1) Before names of substances and abstract nouns (*i.e.* uncountable nouns) used in a general sense; as,

*Sugar* is bad for your teeth.

*Gold* is a precious metal.

*Wisdom* is the gift of heaven.

*Honesty* is the best policy.

*Virtue* is its own reward.

**Note**—Uncountable nouns take *the* when used in a particular sense (especially when qualified by an adjective or adjectival phrase or clause); as,

Would you pass me *the* sugar? (= the sugar on the table)

*The* wisdom of Solomon is great.

I can't forget *the* kindness with which he treated me.

(2) Before plural countable nouns used in a general sense; as,

*Children* like chocolates.

*Computers* are used in many offices.

Note that such nouns take *the* when used with a particular meaning; as,

Where are *the* children? (= our children)

(3) Before most proper nouns (except those referred to earlier), namely, names of people (e.g. Gopal, Rahim), names of continents, countries, cities, etc. (e.g. Europe, Pakistan, Nagpur), names of individual mountains (e.g. Mount Everest), individual islands, lakes, hills, etc.

(4) Before names of meals (used in a general sense); as,

What time do you have lunch ?

*Dinner* is ready.

**Note**—We use *a* when there is an adjective before *breakfast*, *lunch*, *dinner*, etc. We use *the* when we specify.

I had *a late* lunch today.

*The dinner* we had at the Tourist Hotel was very nice.

(5) Before languages; as,

We are studying *English*.

They speak *Punjabi* at home.

(6) Before *school*, *college*, *university*, *church*, *bed*, *hospital*, *prison*, when these places are visited or used for their primary purpose; as,

I learnt French at *school*.

We go to *church* on Sundays.

He stays in *bed* till nine every morning.

My uncle is still in *hospital*.

**Note**—*The* is used with these words when we refer to them as a definite place, building or object rather than to the normal activity that goes on there; as,

*The* school is very near my home.

I met him at *the* church.

*The* bed is broken.

I went to *the* hospital to see my uncle.

(7) Before names of relations, like *father, mother, aunt, uncle*, and also *cook and nurse*, meaning 'our cook', 'our nurse', as,

*Father* has returned.

*Aunt* wants you to see her.

*Cook* has given notice.

(8) Before predicative nouns denoting a unique position, *i.e.*, a position that is normally held at one time by one person only; as,

He was elected *chairman* of the Board.

Mr. Banerji became *Principal* of the College in 1995.

(9) In certain phrases consisting of a transitive verb followed by its object; as,

to catch fire, to take breath, to give battle, to cast anchor, to send word, to bring word, to give ear, to lay siege, to set sail, to lose heart, to set foot, to leave home, to strike root, to take offence.

(10) In certain phrases consisting of a preposition followed by its object; as,

at home, in hand, in debt, by day, by night, at daybreak, at sunrise, at noon, at sunset, at night, at anchor, at sight, on demand, at interest, on earth, by land, by water, by river, by train, by steamer, by name, on horseback, on foot, on deck, in jest, at dinner, at ease, under ground, above ground.

## EXERCISE IN COMPOSITION 23

Complete the following sentences by filling in *a* or *an* or *the* as may be suitable :

1. Copper is \_\_\_ useful metal.
2. He is not \_\_\_ honourable man.
3. \_\_\_ able man has not always a distinguished look.
4. \_\_\_ reindeer is a native of Norway.
5. Honest men speak \_\_\_ truth.
6. Rustum is \_\_\_ young Parsee.
7. Do you see \_\_\_ blue sky ?
8. Varanasi is \_\_\_ holy city.
9. Aladdin had \_\_\_ wonderful lamp.
10. The world is \_\_\_ happy place.
11. He returned after \_\_\_ hour.
12. \_\_\_ school will shortly close for the Puja holidays.
13. \_\_\_ sun shines brightly.
14. I first met him \_\_\_ year ago.
15. Yesterday \_\_\_ European called at my office.
16. Sanskrit is \_\_\_ difficult language.
17. \_\_\_ Ganga is \_\_\_ sacred river.
18. \_\_\_ lion is \_\_\_ king of beasts.
19. You are \_\_\_ fool to say that.
20. French is \_\_\_ easy language.
21. Who is \_\_\_ girl sitting there?
22. Which is \_\_\_ longest river in India ?
23. Rama has come without \_\_\_ umbrella.
24. Mumbai is \_\_\_ very costly place to live in.
25. She is \_\_\_ untidy girl.
26. The children found \_\_\_ egg in the nest.
27. I bought \_\_\_ horse, \_\_\_ ox, and \_\_\_ buffalo.
28. If you see him, give him \_\_\_ message.
29. English is \_\_\_ language of \_\_\_ people of England.
30. The guide knows \_\_\_ way.
31. Sri Lanka is \_\_\_ island.
32. Let us discuss \_\_\_ matter seriously.
33. John got \_\_\_ best present.
34. Man, thou art \_\_\_ wonderful animal.
35. India is one of \_\_\_ most industrial countries in Asia.
36. He looks as stupid as \_\_\_ owl.
37. He is \_\_\_ honour to this profession.

## REPETITION OF THE ARTICLE

### 113. If I say—

I have a black and white dog.

I mean a dog that is partly black and partly white.

### But if I say—

I have a black and a white dog,

I mean two dogs, one black and the other white.

Hence when two or more adjectives qualify the *same* noun, the Article is used before the *first adjective only*, but when they qualify *different* nouns, expressed or understood, the Article is normally used before *each adjective*.

### 114. Compare :

1. *The* Secretary and Treasurer is absent.
2. *The* Secretary and *the* Treasurer are absent.

The first sentence clearly indicates that the posts of Secretary and Treasurer are held by *one* person.

The repetition of the article in the second sentence indicates that the two posts are held by *two* different persons.

Hence we see that when two or more connected nouns refer to the *same* person or thing, the Article is ordinarily used before *the first only*; but when two or more connected nouns refer to *different* persons or things, the Article is used before *each*.

Also examine the following sentences :

Sir Surendranath was a great orator and statesman.

There are on the committee among others a great economist and a great lawyer.

### 115. We may either say—

*The* third and *the* fourth chapter.

[Or] *The* third and fourth chapters.

116. In expressing a comparison, if two nouns refer to the same person or thing, the Article is used before *the first noun only*; as,

He is a better mechanic than clerk.

He is a better poet than novelist.

He is a better thinker than debater.

He would make a better engineer than lawyer.

But if they refer to *different* persons or things, the Article must be used with *each noun*; as,

He is a better mechanic than a clerk (would make).

He would make a better statesman than a philosopher (would make).