

THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

The word “the” is one of the most common words in English. It is our only definite article. Nouns in English are preceded by the definite article when the speaker believes that the listener already knows what he is referring to. A helpful rule is:

IF YOU CAN POINT YOUR FINGER AT IT, EVEN ABSTRACTLY, USE “THE”

However, this rule, although useful, isn't always 100% clear or reliable. Here are more specific rules concerning the use of the definite article:

Use “the” to refer to something which has already been mentioned in the conversation or text:

- *On Monday, an unarmed man stole €1,000 from the bank. The thief hasn't been caught yet.*
- *I was walking past Benny's Bakery when I decided to go into the bakery to get some bread.*
- *There's a position available in my team. The job will involve some international travel.*

Use “the” when you assume there is just one of something in that place, even if it has not been mentioned before.

- *We went on a walk in the forest yesterday.*
- *Where is the bathroom?*
- *Turn left and go to number 45. Our house is across from the Italian restaurant.*
- *My father enjoyed the book you gave him.*

Use “the” in sentences or clauses where you define or identify a particular person or object.

- *The man who wrote this book is famous.*
- *I scratched the red car parked outside.*
- *I live in the small house with a blue door.*
- *He is the doctor I came to see.*

Use “the” to refer to people or objects that are unique.

- *The sun rose at 6:17 this morning.*
- *You can go anywhere in the world.*
- *Clouds drifted across the sky.*
- *The president will be speaking on TV tonight.*
- *The CEO of Luxottica is coming to our meeting.*

Use “the” before superlatives and ordinal numbers.

- *This is the tallest building in Naples.*
- *She read the last chapter of her new book first.*
- *You are the tallest person in our class.*
- *This is the third time I have called you today.*

Use “the” with adjectives, to refer to a whole group of people.

- *The French enjoy cheese.*
- *The elderly require special attention.*
- *She has given a lot of money to the poor.*

Use "the" with decades.

- *He was born in the seventies.*
- *This is a painting from the 1820's.*
- *Anne grew up in the '50s.*

Use "the" with clauses introduced by "only".

- *This is the only day we've had sunshine all week.*
- *You are the only person he will listen to.*
- *The only tea I like is black tea.*

Proper names and nouns:

Use "the" with names of geographical areas, rivers, mountain ranges, groups of islands, canals, and oceans.

- *They are travelling in the Arctic.*
- *Our ship crossed the Atlantic in 7 days.*
- *I will go on a cruise down the Nile.*
- *Hiking across the Himalayas would be difficult.*

Use "the" with countries that have plural names

- *I have never been to the Netherlands.*
- *Do you know anyone who lives in the Philippines?*

Use "the" with countries that include the words "republic", "kingdom", or "states" in their names.

- *She is visiting the United Kingdom.*
- *James is from the Republic of Ireland.*

Use "the" with newspaper names.

- *I read it in the Guardian.*
- *She works for the New York Times.*

Use "the" with the names of famous buildings, works of art, museums, or monuments.

- *Have you been to the Colosseum?*
- *We went to the Louvre and saw the Mona Lisa.*
- *I would like to visit the Leaning Tower of Pisa.*
- *I saw Hamlet at the Globe Theatre.*

Use "the" with the names of hotels & restaurants, unless these are named after a person.

- *They are staying at the Hilton on 6th street.*
- *We ate at the Golden Lion.*

Use "the" with the names of families, but not with the names of individuals.

- *We're having dinner with the Smiths tonight.*
- *The Browns are coming to the cinema with us tomorrow.*

When not to use “the”:

Do not use “the” with names of countries (except for the special cases above).

- *Germany is an important economic power.*
- *He's just returned from Zimbabwe.*

Do not use “the” with the names of languages.

- *French is spoken in Tahiti.*
- *English uses many words of Latin origin.*
- *Indonesian is a relatively new language.*

Do not use “the” with the names of meals.

- *Lunch is my favourite meal.*
- *I like to eat breakfast early.*

Do not use “the” with people's names.

- *John is coming over later.*
- *Mary Carpenter is my boss.*

Do not use “the” with titles when combined with names.

- *Prince Charles is Queen Elizabeth's son.*
- *President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas.*

Do not use “the” after the -'s possessive case (Saxon genitive).

- *His brother's car was stolen.*
- *Peter's house is over there.*

Do not use “the” with professions.

- *Engineering is a well-paid career.*
- *He'll probably study medicine.*

Do not use “the” with names of shops.

- *I'll get the card at Smith's.*
- *Can you go to Lidl for me?*

Do not use “the” with years.

- *1948 was a wonderful year.*
- *He was born in 1995.*

Do not use “the” with uncountable nouns.

- *Rice is an important food in Asia.*
- *Milk is often added to tea in England.*

Do not use “the” with the names of individual mountains, lakes and islands.

- *Mount Blanc is the highest mountain in western Europe.*
- *She lives near Lake Garda.*
- *Have you visited Long Island?*

Do not use “the” with most names of towns, streets, stations and airports

- *Victoria Station is in the centre of London.*
- *Can you direct me to Bond Street?*
- *She lives in Florence.*
- *They're flying into Heathrow.*

EXERCISES – USE OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE “THE”

In each exercise, decide whether the definite article should be used in gap.

1. Be careful when you drive home tonight, _____ snow is very deep.
2. Do we have _____ homework today?
3. In my opinion _____ wine they produce in France today is not as good as it used to be.
4. What happens to _____ blood that is taken from athletes for drug-testing?
5. If you want to make bread, you will need to buy _____ flour. We don't have any left.
6. I hate _____ wet weather.
7. I take my driving test tomorrow. Wish me _____ luck!
8. Balloons are full of _____ air.
9. Her new dress is made of _____ very soft wool.
10. I think that _____ health is more important than money.
11. The fox came into the garden looking for _____ food.
12. I usually eat _____ rice for lunch.
13. I'm not keen on _____ food they serve in the school cafeteria.
14. Most wedding rings are made of _____ gold.
15. Do you like _____ beer? - No, I don't drink alcohol.
16. We need _____ new furniture. These chairs are getting very shabby.
17. Every living thing needs _____ water.
18. I don't like _____ toothpaste I bought last week. It tastes of onions!
19. Bees make _____ honey.
20. I can't believe _____ luck he had winning all that money.
21. Some children in Africa have never seen _____ snow.
22. When are you going to return _____ money I lent you last week?
23. Do you like _____ Indian food? - Not really!
24. There's _____ butter on your chin.
25. Did you know that _____ gold in this ring is from the stream at the bottom of garden?
26. Many people think that _____ beer they brew in Germany is the best in the world.
27. You have made _____ very good progress in your understanding of physics.
28. Some people think that _____ money is the most important thing in life.
29. I am worried about _____ health of my grandfather. He goes to the doctor every week.
30. I think that _____ tea which is grown in India tastes the best.
31. When you heat _____ snow it does not produce much water.
32. I need _____ help. - Sorry, I'm busy at the moment.
33. I love Portugal. _____ sand on the beaches there is so white and soft.
34. Are you sure this chair is made of _____ plastic? It looks like wood.
35. I think that _____ homework our English teacher gave us is too difficult.
36. The girl had cut herself with a knife and _____ blood was coming out of her thumb.
37. Don't drink _____ water out of that tap. It's orange!
38. Where's _____ salt? - Are you blind? It's next to your plate!
39. Can you pass me _____ butter, please? - It's not butter, it's margarine!
40. The window was open and _____ air in the room was freezing cold.
41. Vegetarians don't eat _____ meat.
42. I wouldn't eat _____ meat in that freezer. It's been there for more than 2 years.
43. I think that they have overcooked _____ rice in this sushi.
44. Have you seen _____ soap? - No, it should be on the sink.
45. Of all sports, _____ tennis is my favourite.
46. I feel sick. I think it was _____ cheese I had for dinner.
47. You should brush your teeth at least twice a day with _____ toothpaste.
48. Do you take _____ sugar in your coffee? - No, not anymore.
49. Be careful with that! It's made of _____ glass.
50. What you need now is _____ sleep.

EXERCISES – USE OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE “THE” – ANSWER KEY

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