

A/an and the

A Study this example:

I had a sandwich and an apple for lunch.

The sandwich wasn't very good, but the apple was nice.



Joe says 'a sandwich', 'an apple' because this is the first time he talks about them.

Joe now says 'the sandwich', 'the apple' because Karen knows which sandwich and which apple he means – the sandwich and the apple that he had for lunch.

Compare a and the in these examples:

- ☐ A man and a woman were sitting opposite me. The man was American, but I think the woman was British.
- ☐ When we were on holiday, we stayed at a hotel. Sometimes we ate at the hotel and sometimes we went to a restaurant.

B

We use the when we are thinking of a specific thing. Compare a/an and the:

- ☐ Tim sat down on a chair. (perhaps one of many chairs in the room)
Tim sat down on the chair nearest the door. (a specific chair)
- ☐ Paula is looking for a job. (not a specific job)
Did Paula get the job she applied for? (a specific job)
- ☐ Have you got a car? (not a specific car)
I cleaned the car yesterday. (= my car)

C

We use the when it is clear in the situation which thing or person we mean. For example, in a room we talk about the light / the floor / the ceiling / the door / the carpet etc. :

- ☐ Can you turn off the light, please? (= the light in this room)
- ☐ I took a taxi to the station. (= the station in that town)
- ☐ (in a shop) I'd like to speak to the manager, please. (= the manager of this shop)

In the same way, we say (go to) the bank, the post office:

- ☐ I have to go to the bank and then I'm going to the post office. (The speaker is usually thinking of a specific bank or post office.)

We also say (go to) the doctor / the dentist:

- ☐ Caroline isn't very well. She's gone to the doctor. (= her usual doctor)
- ☐ I don't like going to the dentist.

Compare the and a:

- ☐ I have to go to the bank today.
Is there a bank near here?
- ☐ I don't like going to the dentist.
My sister is a dentist.

D

We say 'once a week / three times a day / £1.50 a kilo' etc. :

- ☐ 'How often do you go to the cinema?' 'About once a month.'
- ☐ 'How much are those potatoes?' '£1.50 a kilo.'
- ☐ Helen works eight hours a day, six days a week.

The 1

A

We use the when there is only one of something:

- ☐ What is the longest river in the world? (there is only one longest river)
- ☐ The earth goes round the sun and the moon goes round the earth.
- ☐ Have you ever crossed the equator?
- ☐ I'm going away at the end of this month.

Don't forget the:

- ☐ Paris is the capital of France. (not Paris is capital of ...)

But we use a/an to say what kind of thing something is (see Unit 71B). Compare the and a:

- ☐ The sun is a star. (= one of many stars)
- ☐ The hotel we stayed at was a very nice hotel.

B

We say: the sky, the sea, the ground, the country, the environment.

- ☐ We looked up at all the stars in the sky. (not in sky)
- ☐ Would you like to live in the country? (= not in a town)
- ☐ We must do more to protect the environment. (= the natural world around us)

But we say space (without the) when we mean 'space in the universe'. Compare:

- ☐ There are millions of stars in space. (not in the space)
- ☐ I tried to park my car, but the space was too small.

C

We use the before same (the same):

- ☐ Your pullover is the same colour as mine. (not is same colour)
- ☐ 'Are these keys the same?' 'No, they're different.'

D

We say: (go to) the cinema, the theatre.

- ☐ I go to the cinema a lot, but I haven't been to the theatre for ages.

When we say the cinema / the theatre, we do not necessarily mean a specific cinema or theatre.

We usually say the radio, but television (without the). Compare:

- ☐ I listen to the radio a lot. but I watch television a lot.
- ☐ We heard the news on the radio. but We watched the news on television.

The television = the television set:

- ☐ Can you turn off the television, please?

E

Breakfast lunch dinner

We do not normally use the with the names of meals (breakfast, lunch etc.):

- ☐ What did you have for breakfast?
- ☐ We had lunch in a very nice restaurant.
- ☐ What time is dinner?

But we use a if there is an adjective before breakfast, lunch etc. :

- ☐ We had a very nice lunch. (not We had very nice lunch)

F

Platform 5 Room 126 etc.

We do not use the before noun + number. For example, we say:

- ☐ Our train leaves from Platform 5. (not the Platform 5)
- ☐ (in a shop) Have you got these shoes in size 43? (not the size 43)

In the same way, we say: Room 126 (in a hotel), page 29 (of a book), question 3 (in an exam), Gate 10 (at an airport) etc.

Exercises

Unit 72

72.1 Put in a/an or the.

- This morning I bought newspaper and magazine. newspaper is in my bag, but I can't remember where I put magazine.
- I saw accident this morning. car crashed into tree. driver of car wasn't hurt, but car was badly damaged.
- There are two cars parked outside: blue one and grey one. blue one belongs to my neighbours; I don't know who owner of grey one is.
- My friends live in old house in small village. There is beautiful garden behind house. I would like to have garden like that.

72.2 Put in a/an or the.

- This house is very nice. Has it got garden?
 - It's a beautiful day. Let's sit in garden.
 - I like living in this house, but it's a pity that garden is so small.
- Can you recommend good restaurant?
 - We had dinner in very nice restaurant.
 - We had dinner in best restaurant in town.
- She has French name, but in fact she's English, not French.
 - What's name of that man we met yesterday?
 - We stayed at a very nice hotel - I can't remember name now.
- There isn't airport near where I live. nearest airport is 70 miles away.
 - Our flight was delayed. We had to wait at airport for three hours.
 - Excuse me, please. Can you tell me how to get to airport?
- 'Are you going away next week?' 'No, week after next.'
 - I'm going away for week in September.
 - Gary has a part-time job. He works three mornings week.

72.3 Put in a/an or the where necessary.

- Would you like apple? *Would you like an apple?*
- How often do you go to dentist?
- Could you close door, please?
- I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do that. It was mistake.
- Excuse me, where is bus station, please?
- I have problem. Can you help me?
- I'm just going to post office. I won't be long.
- There were no chairs, so we sat on floor.
- Have you finished with book I lent you?
- My sister has just got job in bank in Manchester.
- We live in small flat in city centre.
- There's supermarket at end of street I live in.

72.4 Answer these questions about yourself. Where possible, use the structure in Section D (once a week / three times a day etc.).

- How often do you go to the cinema? *Three or four times a year.*
- How much does it cost to hire a car in your country? *About £20 a day.*
- How often do you go to the cinema?
- How often do you go away on holiday?
- What's the usual speed limit in towns in your country?
- How much sleep do you need?
- How often do you go out in the evening?
- How much television do you watch (on average)?

Exercises

Unit 73

73.1 Put in the or a/an where necessary. If no word is necessary, leave the space empty.

- Where did you have lunch?
 - We went to restaurant.
- Did you have nice holiday?
 - Yes, it was best holiday I've ever had.
- Where's nearest shop?
 - There's one at end of this street.
- Do you often listen to radio?
 - No. In fact I haven't got radio.
- Would you like to travel in space?
 - Yes, I'd love to go to moon.
- Do you go to cinema very often?
 - No, not very often. But I watch a lot of films on television.
- It was nice day yesterday, wasn't it?
 - Yes, it was beautiful. We went for a walk by sea.
- What did you have for breakfast this morning?
 - Nothing. I never eat breakfast.
- Excuse me, where is Room 25, please?
 - It's on second floor.
- We spent all our money because we stayed at most expensive hotel in town.
 - Why didn't you stay at cheaper hotel?

73.2 Put in the where necessary. If you don't need the, leave the space empty.

- I haven't been to the cinema for ages.
- I lay down on ground and looked up at sky.
- Sarah spends most of her free time watching television.
- television was on, but nobody was watching it.
- Lisa and I arrived at same time.
- Have you had dinner yet?
- You'll find information you need at top of page 15.
- What's capital city of Canada?

73.3 Put in the or a/an where necessary. (See Unit 72 for a/an and the if necessary.)

- Sun is star. *The sun is a star.*
- Paul lives in small village in country.
- Moon goes round earth every 27 days.
- I'm fed up with doing same thing every day.
- It was very hot day. It was hottest day of year.
- I don't usually have lunch, but I always eat good breakfast.
- If you live in foreign country, you should try and learn language.
- We missed our train because we were waiting on wrong platform.
- Next train to London leaves from Platform 3.

73.4 Complete the sentences using the following. Use the where necessary.

- breakfast cinema ~~dinner~~ gate Gate 21 question 8 sea
- 'Are you going out this evening?' 'Yes, after dinner.'
 - There was no wind, so was very calm.
 - The test wasn't too difficult, but I couldn't answer
 - 'I'm going to tonight.' 'Are you? What are you going to see?'
 - I didn't have time for this morning because I was in a hurry.
 - Oh, is open. I must have forgotten to shut it.
 - (*airport announcement*) Flight AB123 to Rome is now boarding at