

Articles

Most of us are highly prone to commit errors related to “articles”, as **there is no such thing as “articles” in Hindi or any other Indian language**. But to an accomplished speaker of English, the wrong usage (or omission) of articles can be very jarring to the ears.

There is no escape. CAT lays a lot of emphasis on articles. So we have to learn to use the right article in the right place or to omit the article where it is not required. Almost 40 percent grammar questions in the CAT are from articles.

The good news: There are only three articles.

The bad news: There are enough rules and exceptions to confuse you unless you pay close attention to the theory and practise, practise and practise.

Three forms of articles

There are three forms of articles. “A” and “an” are called the indefinite articles. “The” is the definite article.

“A” or “an”?

Should you use “a” or “an” before a noun? This depends upon the spellings, sound or pronunciation of the noun.

“A” is used before nouns that begin with a consonant.

Examples: **A** boy, **a** table, **a** house, **a** book.

“A” is also used before words beginning with a vowel that is pronounced with a consonant sound.

Examples: **A** European, **a** unique chance, **a** one-rupee note, **a** usual sight, **a** universal truth, **a** utensil, **a** uniform, etc.

Note: You will see that all these words begin with the sound of “y” or “w” (which are consonants) and not with the sound of any vowel.

“An” is used before those words which begin with a vowel (a, e, i, o, u).

Examples: **An** enemy, **an** ox, **an** inkpot, **an** ass.

“An” is also used before those words which begin with a silent “h”.

Examples: **An** hour, **an** honourable man, **an** honest person, **an** heir, **an** hour, etc.

Some abbreviations are pronounced with a vowel sound and therefore “an” is used before them.

Examples: **An** MBA, **an** MP, **an** MLA, **an** FIR, **an** HMT, **an** RTO, etc.

If these abbreviations are used in their full form, they take article “a”. Examples: **A** Member of Parliament (**an** MP), a Master of Arts (**an** MA).

When to use the indefinite article, “a” or “an”

Representing a whole class

When a singular countable noun represents a whole class, the indefinite article is used before the noun.

1. **A** cow has horns. (*All cows have horns.*)
2. **An** eagle flies very high. (*All eagles fly very high.*)
3. **A** dog is a faithful animal.
4. **A** rose smells very sweet.



PheW!
This should be
EASY!

More than one noun or adjective

When more than one noun or adjective point to one person or thing, "a" or "an" is used before the first noun or adjective and its form is determined by the same first word.

But if the nouns or adjectives point to different persons or things, "a" or "an" is used before each word, and the form of the article is determined by each word separately.

1. He gave me **a red and blue** pencil. (*Only one pencil*)
2. He gave me **a red and a blue** pencil. (*Two pencils*)
3. Here is **an ugly and foolish** man. (*One person*)
4. Here are **an ugly and a foolish** man. (*Two persons*)



Really!!

After such, so, what, how, etc.

1. I have never seen **such a beautiful** picture. (*Not a such beautiful*)
2. **Such a** thing has never happened before.
3. It was **such a** fine show.
4. He gave us **such a** pleasant surprise.
5. I have never seen **so beautiful a picture**. (*Not a so beautiful picture*)
6. It was **so fine a show**.
7. He gave us so **pleasant a surprise**.
8. I have never read **so interesting a novel**.
9. What **a** hot day!
10. What **a** cruel act!
11. What **a pretty** child!
12. What **a good** chance!
13. How **good a** chance!

Watch out for the following expressions:

Many **a** man, such **a** beautiful girl, such **a** house, what **a** man, what **a** place, as gentle **a** girl as she, as brave **a** man as he, how good **a** boy, how excellent **an** opportunity, so serious **an** attempt, so brave **a** man, too clear **an** answer, too far **a** place.

Numerical expressions

"A" or "an" is used before some **numerical expressions** also.

Examples: a couple, a dozen, a score, a hundred, a thousand, a million, a lot of, a great many of, etc.

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| 1. A couple of people were there. | 2. He gave me a thousand rupees. |
| 3. A great many visitors had turned up. | 4. A score of houses had been damaged. |

Expressions of price, speed, ratio, etc.

"A" or "an" is also used with expressions of price, speed, ratio, etc.

1. The train is running at 90 kilometres **an hour**.
2. Bananas are available at 10 rupees **a dozen**.
3. Sugar sells at 10 rupees **a kilo**.
4. Colour and water are mixed in **a ratio** of one to five. (*Not "the ratio"*)
5. Take this medicine three times **a day**.

With a surname

If we know only the surname of a person, and know nothing more, we use "a" before the surname.

1. **A Mr. Sharma** came in the morning.
2. I met **a Mrs. Peters** on the train.
3. **A Miss Renick** is a regular visitor here.
4. **A Ms. Puri** is waiting for you.

With some typical phrases

"A" or "an" is also used before some typical expressions.

Such expressions include: To make **a noise**, to take **a fancy** to, to have **a headache** or **a pain**, to take **a liking** to, to have **a cold**, to have **a mind** of one's own, to have **an eye** to, to make **a fire**, to be in **a hurry**, to be in **a temper**, to have **a taste** for.

When to use the definite article, "The"

Before definite person or thing

Article "the" is used before a definitely specified person or thing. In other words, "the" is used before a person or a thing which has already been referred to earlier, or which has been specified in some other way.

1. This is **the house** in which my friend lives. (*Here **a house** cannot be used because the house has been specified as the one where my friend lives.*)
2. **The place** where I was born is far away from here.
3. This is **the book** I purchased yesterday.
4. He is **the gentleman** whom I introduced to you last year.

Unique common nouns

"The" is used before all those common nouns which are **only one** or believed to be only one (but which are not proper nouns).

1. **The earth** is round.
2. **The sky** is blue.
3. **The sun** has risen.
4. **The moon** shines.

Before representative singular nouns

1. **The** cow is a gentle animal.
2. **The** rose is a sweet smelling flower.
3. **The** apple is good for children.
4. **The** horse lives on grass.

Please note that in all these cases, it is also correct to use "a". So we can also say, "a cow", "a rose", "an apple" and "a horse".

"The" is **not** used before **man**, **woman**, or **mankind**, even if they represent the whole class.

1. Man is a social animal. (*Not The man*)
2. Woman is man's partner. (*Not The woman*)

Before names of mountains, rivers, oceans, lakes, bays, islands, etc.

1. **The** Ganges is a holy river.
2. **The** Himalayas are the highest mountains.
3. **The** Red Sea is a small sea.
4. **The** British Isles are in Europe.

But "the" is **not** used before a single specified peak or hill.

1. Mount Everest (*not the Mount Everest*)
2. Mount Abu (*not the Mount Abu*)

Before the titles of books, magazines or newspapers

Examples: **The** Ramayana, **The** Iliad, **The** Vedas, **The** Gulliver's Travels.

But if the author's name is mentioned with the title of a book, "**the**" is not used.

Examples: Homer's **Iliad**, Tulsī's **Ramcharitmanas**, Shakespeare's **Tempest**.

Before musical instruments

The flute, **the** guitar, **the** orchestra.

Before superlative adjectives or adverbs

The highest mountain, **the longest** river, **the best** boy, **the most** important point, **the most** honourable man.

Before the proper noun which carries its qualifying adjective before it

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| 1. The great Caesar | 2. The immortal Shakespeare |
| 3. The gentle-hearted Lamb | 4. The brave Rana Pratap |
| 5. The late Mrs. Indira Gandhi. | |

Before the common noun which expresses the sense of an abstract noun

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| 1. The patriot in him did not let him yield. | 2. The warrior in him kept his morale high. |
| 3. The father in him came to his support at last. | |

Before proper nouns that stand for some nation or people

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| 1. The English are very hard working. | 2. The French are very fashionable. |
| 3. The German are heroic people. | |

If "**the**" is not used before such countries or nations, they would mean the language of those countries or nations. Thus "**English**" means "English Language", and "**The English**" means "English people".

Before a noun to give it the force of the superlative

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| 1. He is the scholar of the day. | 2. He is the historian on this period. |
| 3. PT is the institute to join for MBA entrance training. | |

Before ordinal numbers

The first, **the** fifth, **the** fourth, **the** 4th, **the** 8th, **the** 3rd, **the** 2nd, **the** 15th of April, **the** fifteenth of April, George **the** Fifth, Henry **the** 8th.

But if these ordinal numbers are written in Roman figures, "the" is not used.

Examples: V Chapter, Canto XII, George V, Henry VIII.

Before names of professions

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| 1. He has joined the bar. | 2. He has gone to the navy. |
| 3. I am interested in the teaching profession. | 4. He is a member of the bench. |

Before common nouns used as appositions to proper nouns

1. Delhi, **the** capital of India
2. Nehru, **the** great patriot
3. Rana Pratap, **the** great warrior

When to omit articles

Before plural nouns

Normally no article is used before plural nouns.

1. Birds fly.
2. Cows give milk.
3. I love books.

But if the plural noun points to some specific or special thing, "**the**" is used.

1. **The** birds of Africa are large in size.
2. **The** cows of Haryana give much milk.

Before a proper noun

1. Ram is coming.
2. Mohan loves his sister.

Some of us have a peculiar tendency to use "**the**" before proper nouns. For example, we say, "**India will not attack the Pakistan**". This is very painful to hear. Please avoid this mistake.

Before an abstract noun

1. Love is blind.
2. Wisdom comes with age.
3. This is real beauty.

Before a material noun

1. Gold is costly.
2. Silver is white.
3. Cotton grows in our country.
4. Water is life.

Note: Normally, no article is used before uncountable nouns. If these nouns are followed by some prepositional phrase (with **in** or **of**), they become countable nouns. In such cases, "**the**" is used before them.

1. Kalidas is **the** Shakespeare of India.
2. **The** beauty of Kashmir is remarkable.
3. **The** gold of Kollar fields is not of high quality.
4. **The** milk in the cup has turned sour.
5. **The** wisdom of Solomon was known far and wide.

Before collective nouns

1. Society will not permit it.
2. Parliament is in session.
3. Jury has given its verdict.
4. Army is on the move.

Before names of certain countries

Normally no article is used before the names of countries or states. But "**the**" is used before the names of the following countries and states: The USA, the UK, the Sudan, the Netherlands, the Congo, etc.

Before names of languages, diseases, festivals, seasons

1. I know English.
2. He knows French.
3. Cholera has broken out.
4. He is coming on Christmas.
5. These are winter sports.
6. Let us visit Shimla in spring.
7. I don't travel in summer.

Before names of games, sports and meals

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| 1. I am late for dinner. | 2. I have breakfast quite early. |
| 3. I shall return for supper. | 4. He plays cricket. |
| 5. They are fond of football. | |

Before names of relations

No article is used before names of relations such as **father, mother, brother, sister, aunt, uncle**, etc. **Cook** and **nurse** are also included in this list.

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| 1. Father is coming today. | 2. Mother is not well today. |
| 3. Cook is in the kitchen. | 4. Nurse is very kind. |

Before names of institutions used for their specific function

School, college, church, chapel, court, work, hospital, market, bed, table, sea, prison also take no article before them when they are used for their specific purpose or function. For example, schools or colleges for education, church for prayer and market for purchase or sale.

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| 1. I am going to college. (<i>for study</i>) | 2. I am going to church. (<i>for prayer or worship</i>) |
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But when they mean only building or place for visit or sightseeing or any other purpose, they take appropriate articles.

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| 1. The college is at the next crossing. | 2. The church is magnificent. |
| 3. The market is closed. | |

Complement used after "elect", "appoint", "make" or "crown"

Such nouns refer to men of unique position.

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| 1. He was appointed principal. | 2. They made him chairman. |
| 3. They are going to crown him king. | 4. He was elected speaker of the assembly. |

Before noun used after "kind of" or "sort of"

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| 1. What kind of chair do you want to buy? | 2. I cannot deal with this sort of man. |
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But if **kind of** or **sort of** refers to some special quality or talent, it would take an appropriate article.

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| 1. What kind of a musician is he? |
| 2. What sort of a problem would you like to discuss? |

Nouns in pairs

They are wife and husband.

Other such pairs are: Father and mother; brother and sister; father and son; from door to door; from house to house; face to face; hand to hand; from man to man; from village to village, etc.

Some popular phrases, idiomatic expressions, places and things

1. To go to: school, college, court, church, market, bed, home, hospital, prison etc.
2. By: road, train, air, sea, ship/steamer, bus, car etc.
3. At home, at church, at school, at college, at office, at dawn, at night, at noon, all day, all night, at fault, at present, at all, at will.
4. For sale, for fear, for favour, for leave, for mercy.
5. In bed, in debt, in fact, in trouble, in hand, at hand, in favour of, in front of, in opposition to, in earnest.
6. Under consideration, under trial, under ground, under pressure.
7. On demand, on trial, on sale, on foot, on earth, on behalf of.
8. To catch fire, to send word, to give ear, to set sail, to lose heart, to set foot, to take offence.

Articles revisited

Incorrect	Correct
The President underscored the need for a constructive and a realistic dialogue of issues of global interest.	The President underscored the need for a constructive and realistic dialogue of issues of global interest.
The English and Hindi language have their own merits.	The English and the Hindi language have their own merits. OR The English and Hindi languages have their own merits.
My father is the chairman and the managing director of his company.	My father is the chairman and managing director of his company.
The manager and assistant of Mr.Bhandari were present at the party.	The manager and the assistant of Mr.Bhandari were present at the party. (<i>Two persons</i>) OR The manager and assistant of Mr.Bhandari was present at the party. (<i>One person</i>)
Tendulkar is a better batsman than a bowler.	Tendulkar is a better batsman than bowler.
There are hundred centimetres in the meter.	There are hundred centimetres in a meter.
He has been causing trouble since a day he came.	He has been causing trouble since the day he came.
The story is there in Bible.	The story is there in the Bible.
Kumble is best bowler in the country.	Kumble is the best bowler in the country.
They won the match in fortieth over.	They won the match in the fortieth over.
The science has developed much in the past hundred years.	Science has developed much in the past hundred years.
What kind of a hobby is this?	What kind of hobby is this?
An iron is a useful metal.	Iron is a useful metal. OR An iron is a useful gadget.
The strength of character is what makes a man successful.	Strength of character is what makes a man successful.
S D Sharma was elected the president of the country.	S D Sharma was elected president of the country.

Articles in place and omitted

Study the following paragraphs for the right use (and omission) of articles, and for the use of certain expressions. You will see almost all the rules of articles in action here.

Thatched roofs **catch fire** (start to burn) in summer. **Send word** (send the message) to me if this happens. I shall definitely **give ear** (listen) to the message. The messenger who **brings word** (brings the message) will also be rewarded.

Tired of life on land, we shall **set sail** (begin a journey on ship) for distant places. We shall not **cast anchor** (lower the anchor) before at least a month will have passed.

But why do I think of these plans now? Nothing has gone wrong so far. So, there is no need to **lose heart** (get disappointed). No enemy has **laid siege to** (started the siege of) our homes. I shall **take offence** (feel hurt) if you even plan to **leave home**.

One should **feel at home** (comfortable) wherever one's home is. A bird **in hand** (able to be used) is worth two in the bush. Besides, a change of place may lead you **into debt**. So, don't let your mind run astray. Work hard **by day** (during the day) and sleep calmly **by night** (during the night). See how the birds get to work **at daybreak**. You should be ready **at sunrise** at least. If it is too hot **at noon**, take some rest. But see to it that you are a satisfied man **at sunset**. Take it from me – you can't work **at night**.

Enough of preaching – is that what you say? All right, I stop there. But, **on demand**, I narrate one of my experiences. I borrowed a huge sum **at interest** and decided to visit the most exciting place **on earth**. I travelled **by land, by water, by river, by train, by steamer**, and even **on horseback** and **on foot**. I tried to know each place *en route* **by name**. I stayed at hotels. One day **at dinner** a man told me: "Have you gone mad? The land is full of tension. None is **at ease** here." I replied **in jest** (jokingly): "If the land is full of tension, I'll add some of mine to it."

Do you know what excitement I had there? When I reached there, I came to know that the army had orders to shoot **at sight** (as soon as seen). My adventure then consisted of hide-and-seek games. I often went in shelters **underground** to avoid being destroyed in bombing.