Using English Articles

a/an  the  zero article

ESL Workshop
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Look at the **words in red**. Decide why these words were chosen.

“NBC News dropped Don Imus yesterday, canceling his talk show on its MSNBC cable news channel a week after he made a racially disparaging remark about the Rutgers University women’s basketball team. The move came after several days of widening calls for Mr. Imus to lose his show both on MSNBC … and CBS Radio, which originates the show.” The remark has upset people from all sectors of the country.

Notice the **words in yellow**. How are they similar or dissimilar to the **articles in red**?

“NBC News dropped Don Imus yesterday, canceling his talk show on its MSNBC cable news channel a week after he made a racially disparaging remark about the Rutgers University women’s basketball team. The move came after several days of widening calls for Mr. Imus to lose his show both on MSNBC… and CBS Radio, which originates the show.” The remark has upset people from all sectors of the country.

Notice the underlined sections. Why aren’t there any articles or possessive or quantity words in their place?

“NBC News dropped _____ Don Imus yesterday, canceling his talk show on its MSNBC cable news channel a week after he made a racially disparaging remark about the Rutgers University women’s basketball team. The move came after ______ several days of ______ widening calls for Mr. Imus to lose his show both on MSNBC… and CBS Radio, which originates the show.” The remark has upset ______ people from all sectors of the country.

Important Terminology

- Count/countable noun
- Noncount/ uncountable noun
- Generic
- Specific/ definite
  
  For more information on the above terms, click here

- Proper Noun
- Context
- Refer
- Previous
The indefinite article (a/an)

**Form:** Using *a* or *an* depends on the following sound

**Meaning:** Indefinite articles usually mean that noun is general and not specific at a certain time. Either there is not yet a context for the noun or a context is unimportant to the meaning of the sentence.

**Use:**
1. **When introducing a singular noun**
   - He made a racially disparaging remark.
   - vs.
   - He made racially offensive remarks.

2. **When classifying or defining a singular subject**
   - Don Imus is a talk show host.
   - vs.
   - Talk show hosts are radio announcers.
Indefinite article (a/an) cont.

3. Before quantifiers of few and little to impart positive rather than negative meaning.

Don Imus has a few supporters.

vs.

Don Imus has few supporters
What about the indefinite article and plural nouns?

1. Indefinite articles **cannot** be used with plural nouns

2. You can use quantity words **some** and **any**.

   - Use **any** for negatives and questions where you doubt what you’re asking for.
     - He doesn’t show **any** remorse for what he said.
     - Does he have **any** supporters?

   - Use **some** for positives and questions where you are believe you’ll receive an affirmative response
     - **Some** people think Imus shouldn’t have been fired.
     - Do you think **some** other talk show hosts will be more careful about what they say?

3. **Some** and **any** can be omitted.
   - Does he have supporters?
   - People think Imus shouldn’t have been fired.
Do **not** use an indefinite article with:

- **Noncount nouns**
  - *a water, *a cash

- **Proper nouns**
  - *a Don Imus, *a Springfield, IL *a Brookens Library

- **Plural nouns**
  - * a basketball games, * a folders

* = grammatically incorrect
Practice Indefinite articles

Practice Here

4 sections – 2 exercises, 1 page of notes, 1 review section
Definite article (the)

- Form: the
- Meaning: “the” usually refers to something definite, something specific.

“NBC News dropped Don Imus yesterday… after he made a racially disparaging remark…” The remark has upset people.
When to use the definite article (the)?

1. When referring to a **specific** or **unique** person or thing.
   Specific or unique things are known from previous mention or context
   
   **The** remark has upset people.
   (This refers back to an earlier sentence when the remark was introduced)

   **The** country is furious.
   (This refers to the context – which country?
   Somewhere in the article this is stated or implied)

Sometimes there is only one of something = **UNIQUE**
(the first word, the best ice cream, the internet)
   
   The first angry comment came immediately.
Definite article (the)

2. Use "the" with the following words:
   first, second, (3rd, 4th, etc.) only, same, right
   (correct), and often with next, last
   The same thing happened two years ago.

3. “The” can be used with singular and plural nouns
   The radio station is worried about losing listeners.
   The media companies are worried about losing listeners.
Common expressions with the definite article

- the bank
- the zoo
- the park
- the doctor
- the gym
- the library
- the museum
- the store
- the beach
- the post office
- the bus
- the train
- the movies
Practice Definite articles

Please read the following April 17, 2007 headline story on CNN. It is no longer available on the CNN.com website.

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate article – the indefinite article (a/an) or the definite article (the).

There is an answer key at the end
Police: Virginia Tech shooter an English major, 23

BLACKSBURG, Virginia (CNN) – The gunman who killed 30 people at Virginia Tech's Norris Hall before turning (1) gun on himself was student Cho Seung-hui, university police Chief Wendell Flinchum said Tuesday.

University officials said they were still trying to determine whether Cho was responsible for (2) earlier shooting at (3) dormitory that left two dead.

However, Flinchum said ballistics tests show that one of (4) two guns recovered at Norris Hall was used at Norris and at (5) dorm, both located on (6) 26,000-student campus.

Authorities are still investigating whether Cho had any accomplices in planning or executing Monday's rampage, Col. Steven Flaherty of (7) Virginia State Police said.
"It certainly is reasonable for us to assume that Cho was (8)____ shooter in both places, but we don't have (9)____ evidence to take us there at this particular point in time," Flaherty said.

Cho, (10)____ 23-year-old South Korean and (11)____ resident alien, lived at (12)____ university's Harper Hall, Flinchum said. He was (13)____ English major, (14)____ chief said.

Cho was (15)____ loner and authorities are having (16)____ hard time finding information about him, said Harry Hincker, associate vice president for university relations.

(17)____ department of Homeland Security official said Cho came to (18)____ United States in 1992, through Detroit, Michigan. He had lawful permanent residence, via his parents, and renewed his green card in October 2003, (19)____ official said.

His residence was listed as Centreville, Virginia, (20)____ suburb of Washington, D.C.
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No Article

Form: ________

Meaning: general or abstract noun. Specificity is not important.

Beauty is individual. Beauty = Abstract

Horses are graceful animals. Horses = General
When to use *no article*?

1. **Don’t use an article when making generalizations about:**
   - plural subjects
     - Racially offensive remarks are disgusting.
   - plural objects
     - Imus has said slurs in the past.

2. **Don’t use an article with noncount subjects**
   - Money will factor into CBS’s decision on whether or not to fire Imus.

3. **Don’t use an article before someone’s name or title + name**
   - Talkshow host Don Imus has been fired.
Common expressions with no article

I have to go to ____________.

school
work
home
Practice definite articles & no articles

Practice Here

- 4 exercises, 1 notes, 1 review + more practice
Special Uses of Articles

Deciding between the and no article

http://gocsm.net/sevas/esl/gramcheck/art-4.html

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/540/01/

(the last three sections on the page)
Online Resources

**Bedford St. Martin**
- you don’t need to register
- must attempt answer before moving on to next question
- Rules & practice + explanation

**Online Writing Lab at Purdue**
- Rules