Activities for Writing Center Workshop - Articles

Choose “a” vs. “the.”

___ man wearing red socks and a purple hat got on a bus going downtown. ___ bus was very crowded, and it often carries people from Little Five Points to the downtown area. ___ man sat next to ___ woman who also wore ___ purple hat. ___ man turned to ___ woman and asked her where she got her purple hat. ___ woman said, “It’s ___ store close to where I live. I will tell you where I got my hat, but only if you tell me where you got those red socks!” ___ man became silent, and looked at ___ child next to him.

Read the text and determine if an article is needed for any of the nouns. Use “the,” “a,” or “Ø” for no article

___ Job can be difficult, but it can also be fun. For ___ my last job at ___ fruit shop, I had to wake up at six a.m. every morning because ___ large trucks brought fruit early every morning. I made ___ coffee for them, and in return they sometimes gave me ___ apple. At times, ___ drivers who came early in the morning also gave me some berries or nuts. Then, I brought ___ fruit from ___ trucks to ___ big refrigerator in the back of ___ our shop. To work at ___ grocery stores, ___ muscles are required. People do not notice this, but strength is ___ most important element when working at ___ fruit shop. I am not ___ strong man, so it was difficult for me.

Choose the right article below. Do this on your own and bring to the Writing Center to check for mistakes.

___ (Ø/The) biologists study the most interesting things! Here is ___ (an/the) example:

The Venus fly trap is ___ (a/some) famous carnivorous plant that grows in North and South Carolina. ___ (Ø/The) entire plant is about one foot tall. In spring, it has ___ (Ø/the) small white flowers. But the most interesting parts of ___ (a/the) plant are its leaves.

___ (Ø/The) leaves grow in ___ (a/some) circle around the bottom of ___ (Ø/the) plant. Each leaf opens into two halves. On ___ (Ø/the) surface of the leaves, there are ___ (some/the) short hairs. They are called ___ (Ø/some) trigger hairs. If ___ (an/the) insect lands on one of ___ (Ø/the) leaves and touches ___ (a/the) trigger hairs in a certain way, ___ (the/some) two halves close tightly around ___ (an/the) insect.

To find more information about ___ (Ø/the) carnivorous plants, look in ___ (Ø/the) plant guides, ___ (an/Ø) encyclopedia, or on ___ (Ø/the) Internet. It can be very interesting to study ___ (Ø/the) plants!
Rules for Correct Article Use

**a or an?** Use *an* when the article is followed a vowel sound (*a, e, i, o, u, sometimes h)*

- *It is an honor to meet you!*
- *The market sold me a bad apple. I think that an apple should taste good!*

**Rule 1:** All singular, countable nouns need an article. Choose “a” or “an” if the noun is indefinite, choose “the” if the noun is definite.

- *Did you see a little boy walk by half an hour ago?*

**Rule 2:** Plural and non-countable nouns do not need an article unless they are definite. (“Some” is often used in place of an article.)

- *He bought rice yesterday. Today, he ate the rice.*

**6 BASIC RULES**

1. **Use definite article the for one of a kind, part of a series, or superlatives:**

   - *He is the best soccer player in all of Brazil.*

2. **Use the definite article the for a noun that has already been introduced** – one that the listener or reader is familiar with because it was already mentioned:

   - “Did you hear? I bought him a sweater and a watch for his birthday!"
   - “Yes, but the sweater does not fit and the watch does not work!”

3. **Use the definite article when you and the listener/reader are talking about something you and the listener/reader are both familiar with** (even though you may not have talked about it for a while), or something that is actually near or around you:

   - “Oh no, the copy machine is broken again!” “Again? How annoying.”

4. **Use the when a prepositional phrase or clause makes the noun unique, identifiable, or specific:**

   - Noun + adjective clause:
     - *The bus behind the shelter will leave soon.*

   - Noun + adjective clause:
     - *The man who got on the bus is a famous musician.*

5. **Use definite article the with certain everyday nouns (bank, store, doctor, hospital, bank, TV, Internet, park) that are familiar to you and everybody else in everyday life, or if there is only one of its kind:**

   - *I’m going to the store, do you need anything?*
   - *Mrs. Stephens is on the phone with Jon, he is in the hospital.*
6. After the preposition in, using an article can change the meaning of some nouns (college, school, prison, court, church, bed, class). Use an article with these nouns to refer to the physical place:

Are your children in the school? (Are they inside the building itself?)

Do not use an article when these nouns refer to the (more abstract) organization and what people usually do within them (for example, “attend school” or “go to church”):

Davis is in prison. (Davis did something bad and is a prisoner now.)

**GENERAL STATEMENTS / SPECIAL CASES**

1. Use a/an for singular count nouns to make a general statement, and no article with plural count and non-count nouns:

   - Singular count noun: A cheetah can run very fast.
   - Plural count noun: Cheetahs can run very fast.
   - Non-count noun: Oxygen is necessary for our survival.

You will also see the before singular count nouns, especially when talking about plants, animals, machines, and musical instruments:

The giant panda is an endangered animal.

“there is/are” is often used with a/an:

There is a big soccer field by the park.

(Avoid “there is/are” in academic writing!)

2. Do not use the in front of the names of languages or countries:

I like to speak French, but I have never been to France.

3. Do not use the in front of the names of meals:

Dinner is in the evening, breakfast is the first meal of the day.

4. Do not use the in front of the people’s titles or professions:

President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas.