

Articles

I. Articles: forms

II. Use of articles: general rules

III. Use of articles: special cases

IV. Use of articles: common mistakes

I. Articles: forms

| Countable nouns | | Uncountable nouns |
|-----------------|----------|-------------------|
| Singular | Plural | |
| the | the | the |
| a/an | 0 (zero) | 0 (zero) |

Note on “a” and “an”

Use “a” before words beginning with **consonant sounds**:

a paper, a research paper, a university (“u” is pronounced as “ju:”)

“an” before words beginning with **vowel sounds**:

an example, an English book, an hour (“h” is not pronounced)

The description of usage given below is not exhaustive; focus is on usage in academic English.

1. The

The definite article is used with **countable (singular or plural) nouns** as well as with **uncountable nouns** when the noun is **determined/specified** by:

a) the situation:

Close the window, please. (= the window in the room where we are sitting)

We must label the equipment before we start using it. (e.g. the equipment in our laboratory)

b) the fact that it has been mentioned before:

The examination consists of a written and an oral part. The written part is usually more difficult than the oral.

c) the unique position of the person it denotes:

the President, the Rector, the Dean, the Head of the Department

Note: after the verbs *be, become* the article is often left out:

He is (the) President of the US.

d) a superlative or ordinal number:

the best choice, the most important arguments

the first part, the second chapter

e) an “of” phrase:

the catalogue of IEEE Standards

f) a relative clause (who/which/that/0):

This is the paper (which/that) I wrote last year.

They described the steel (which/that) they used for this purpose.

Who is to blame for the failure of the experiment?

But: *Design a program that is user-friendly.*

Design a user-friendly program.

(= one of several possible programs)

For exceptions to e) and f) see Zero article a) Note.

The definite article is also used to **refer to**

a) a class or category: *The computer is an important research tool.* (= all computers are)

b) something unique: *the sun, the moon, the sky, the air*

c) people coming from one country: *the English, the French*

2. A/an

The indefinite article is used only with **countable nouns in the singular**

a) when the noun is not specified:

He passed an exam yesterday. (= an unspecified exam)

There is a PhD student waiting outside the Dean's Office.

(we do not know which of the PhD students)

b) when describing - someone or something:

Simulation is an important research tool.

- someone's **occupation:**

She is a teacher. I am a PhD student.

3. 0

The zero article is used with

a) uncountable nouns, both mass and abstract (e.g. *water, light, iron; software, hardware, equipment; physics, mathematics; time, knowledge, information; analysis, comparison, maintenance, verification*) when **the meaning is general:**

It's a matter of time.

But: *We don't know the time of his arrival.*

The experiment took a long time.

All equipment needs regular maintenance.

But: *Who is responsible for the maintenance of the lab equipment?*

Note:

In scientific English, the article is often left out with **nouns describing activities** even when **the meaning is specific** rather than general (e.g. the noun is followed by an "of" phrase or a relative clause).

Verification of our experiment is planned for the next month.

Comparison of these two curves shows.

Evaluation that follows every experiment

b) numerals following the noun:

table/equation/figure/chapter 2, volume/number 5

But: *the first equation*

c) countable nouns in the plural when they denote a class/category:

Computers are important research tools.

d) nouns denoting countries:

England, France, Sweden

But: *the United Kingdom, the United States, the Czech Republic*

(when the name of the country ends in a common noun,
e.g. kingdom, states, republic)

III. Use of articles: special cases

1. Articles are usually omitted in the titles of books/papers and in captions:

Energy Challenges, Ecodesign of Lighting Systems

Fig. 3. Hysteresis loop

2. When generalizing, i.e. referring to a class/category, the noun can be used either

a) in the singular form with the:

The computer is an important research tool.

or b) in the plural form without the article:

Computers are important research tools.

Note: b) (no article + plural form) is preferred, especially in headlines:

Mechanical Drives

The singular form (with or without an article) in a headline is not used to generalize, but to specify, i.e. to provide information about one specific member of the class:

Antro Electric Car, Lifeguard Robot, The English-Teaching Robot

(... developed by the XY Company)

An analysis/Analysis of the Impact of ... (... carried out by ...)

3. Uncountable nouns such as **advice, information, equipment** are not used with the indefinite article. When itemization is needed, phrases such as **a piece/an item of** are used:

He gave me a very valuable piece of advice.

4. Other uncountable nouns, such as **knowledge, understanding, success** can be used with the indefinite article when specifying the level achieved:

a good knowledge, a profound understanding, a great success

5. Some basically uncountable nouns (both mass and abstract) can be used as countables
a) with a different meaning:

Do you have a pen and paper? (= paper)

Professor X wrote a paper on recent developments in his field.

(= článek, referát)

b) when referring to **a kind/kinds; compare:**

Metal, paper and glass can be recycled.

We need a metal that will not bend.

Silver, gold and platinum are precious metals.

What are the latest developments in science?

Mathematics is an exact science.

He studies at the Faculty of Applied Sciences.

See also A Remedial Course in English Grammar: Nouns (Count and uncount nouns).

6. When **-ing forms** in the meaning of **nouns** are used

a) without an article, they are **not followed by "of"**:

Monitoring changes in the pressure is a vital part of the experiment.

b) with an article, they are **followed by "of"** (in such cases the -ing form is usually preceded by an adjective/a phrase):

The ongoing monitoring of changes in the pressure is a vital part of the experiment.

Remember that structure a) is more common than structure b)!!

7. The use/omission of an article can change the meaning:

a Physics and a Maths teacher (= two teachers)

a Physics and Maths teacher (= one teacher of two subjects)

the Dean and the Head of the Department (= two people)

the Dean and Head of the Department

(= one person holding both positions)

8. Note the use of **the indefinite article** in the following and other similar phrases:

at a speed/rate/frequency/pressure/temperature/wavelength of

The car travelled at a speed of 80 miles per hour.

But: at the speed of light

9. No article is used after *type, kind, sort; post, position*:

This is a new type of camera.

He has held the position of Head of the Department since 2007.

IV. Use of articles: common mistakes

1. Leaving out the article before countable nouns in the singular:

Wrong:

His colleagues from Department of Mathematics

The high cost of this material is disadvantage.

Right:

*.... from **the** Department ...*

*... is **a** disadvantage*

2. Using the definite article after *be, become*:

Wrong:

I am the student at the Faculty of ...

Right:

*I am **a** student ...*

3. Leaving out the definite article before:

next, last

Wrong:

We can now move to next picture.

In last part of my presentation I will

Right:

*... to **the next** picture.*

*In **the last** part ...*

Do not use “the” with:

next/last week, month, year

I wasn't here last time.

But:

***the last week of** this semester*

***The last time (that)** I saw her was in June.*

main

Wrong:

This is not main problem.

Right:

*... not **the main** problem.*

same

Wrong:

We used same method in both cases.

Right:

*... **the same** method*

following

Wrong:

Our results are presented in following table.

Right:

*... in **the following** table.*

above mentioned/described

Wrong:

We obtained different results with above mentioned method.

Right:

*... with **the above mentioned** method.*

4. Using the definite article with **first** in the phrase **at first** (= nejprve)

Wrong:

At the first the solution seemed easy.

Right:

At first

5. Leaving out the indefinite article/using the definite article before

similar

Wrong:

We are working on (the) similar project.

Right:

*We are working on **a similar** project.*

6. Leaving out the definite article in the phrase **in the case of** (= v případě)

Wrong:

in case of

In case of hydroelectric power plants such problems do not arise.

In case of machine design the exam requirements are different.

Right:

in the case of

***In the case of** hydroelectric power plants*

***In the case of** machine design*

Try **not to use** this phrase. In English it is not as common as in Czech.

Alternatives: **with, for**

With hydroelectric power plants ...

For machine design

But: **in case** ... (= pro případ)

Write it down **in case** you forget it.

7. Leaving out the definite article before a numeral denoting a decade:

Wrong:

in 1980s

Right:

*in **the** 1980s*

8. Confusing the following two phrases: *most* (students) and *most of the* (students)

Wrong:

the most of students

Right:

most students (students in general)

most of the students (in a particular group)

10. Leaving out the definite article before *environment* when it means životní prostředí:

Wrong:

Some of these chemicals are damaging to environment.

Right:

*Some chemicals are damaging to **the environment.***

But: *The company did not provide a safe environment for its workers.*

11. Using the definite article with the 's possessive form of proper nouns:

Wrong:

the Minkowski's inequality

Right:

Minkowski's inequality

But: the Minkowski diagram

EXERCISES

I. Correct the mistakes in the use of articles.

1. Primary advantage is an easy maintenance.

.....

2. He opened it with help of a knife.

.....

3. I am writing to apply for a post of the design engineer.

.....

4. According to the Act No 428/2000 the responsibility lies with operator.

.....

5. Author offers several solutions.

.....

6. An aim of my project is to design user-friendly program.

.....

7. For verification of mathematical model generated values were compared with measured values.

.....

8. I'll start with history of supercapacitors.

-
9. Above mentioned solution cannot be used in the practice.
-
10. Most of people in Germany believe that nuclear power plants are dangerous for both the people and environment.
-
11. In the comparison with commercially available sensors our sensors have large number of advantages.
-
12. The first curve is same as in preceding case.
-
13. The Fisher's ideas represent conventional approach to DoE.
-
14. Next step was to verify a hypothesis.
-
15. At the first nothing happens.
-
16. We can now switch to next picture.
-
17. Recording the meeting was good idea.
-
18. This is similar problem.
-

II. Fill in articles where necessary.

1. Various papers dealing with computer-aided design can be found in literature.
2. Both of above mentioned techniques can be recommended.
3. rest of arguments do not require any explanation.
4. This gives good insight into problem.
5. This handbook provides user with number of useful examples.
6. We do not need additional hardware for this research.
7. artificial intelligence is relatively new science.
8. a) It's produced by Toyota company. b) It's produced by Toyota.
9. We used variety of techniques.
10. I'll begin with description of main parameters.
11. purpose of signalling system is to prevent collisions.
12. detailed description of development of artificial intelligence was part of his lecture.
13. They obtained same results as we did.
14. late arrival of some of speakers is reason why we had to make few changes in programme.
15. NC machines were introduced into production in 1990s.
16. following examples are taken from coursebook I recommended to you last time.
17. This is one of questions conference participants might ask.
18. development of such program is time-consuming process.
19. He gave us similar explanation.

III. Translate.

1. Studuje jadernou fyziku.

2. Doufáme, že najdeme řešení v krátké době.

3. Analyzovali složení toho materiálu.

4. Byl to jeden z nejtěžších úkolů.

5. Stalo se to během několika posledních měsíců.

6. Pro tento účel potřebujeme nové zařízení a software.

7. Autoři článku jsou si plně vědomi těchto faktů.

8. Hlavním cílem tohoto článku je podat krátký přehled obnovitelných zdrojů energie.

9. Toto je jednoduchá diferenciální rovnice.

10. Naměřené hodnoty jsou uvedeny v tabulce 1.

11. Zabývali jsme se podobným problémem v minulosti.

12. Hodnoty jsou stejné pro oba typy vinutí.

13. Dal mi mnoho užitečných rad.

14. Připravují nový kurz pro příští školní rok.

15. Můžeš to udělat podobným způsobem.

IV. Study the following sentences and try to find reasons for using/leaving out the articles.

1.

a) He gave a lecture on the latest advances in scientific **knowledge**.

b) He has **a** profound **knowledge** of his field.

c) **The knowledge** I acquired on the course was very useful.

2.

a) **Analysis** of data/Data analysis is an essential part of research.

b) **The data analysis/The analysis** of data was the most complicated part of the project.

c) **Analysis** of the data collected by my colleague was very demanding.

d) We need **a** thorough **analysis** of the data.

3.

a) **Dependence** of power consumption/Power consumption **dependence** on the climate is a well-known fact.

b) We calculated **the dependence** of power consumption/power consumption **dependence**

on the type of day (working days, holidays).

c) **The financial dependence** of universities on grant agencies is sometimes detrimental to research.

4.

a) Some students find it difficult to cope with **change**.

b) The new management will make radical **changes**.

c) According to the Dean, **the changes** made in the curricula last year were necessary.

d) Reducing waste requires **a fundamental change** in attitude.

5.

a) Careful **preparation** of samples is important for the success of any experiment.

b) **The preparation** of samples for that experiment was very time-consuming.

c) **Preparation** of the required samples took me several hours.

d) Business training is **a good preparation** for any career.

e) **Preparations** for the conference are nearing completion.

6.

a) **Heating** the samples to 55°C did not take long.

b) Is **the heating** on?

c) Modern electric cookers use induction **heating**.

d) They invested a lot of money in the new **heating**.

7.

a) He studies graphic and industrial **design**.

b) The success of this car shows the importance of good **design**.

c) **The design** he presented at the conference was no surprise.

d) She preferred **a floral design** for the walls of her office.

8.

a) In such cases, **occurrence** of failure is nothing unexpected.

b) Failure of that system is **a common occurrence**.

c) **The frequent occurrence** of earthquakes in Japan poses a serious threat for its nuclear power plants.

V. Fill in articles where necessary.

1.

1 power engineering

2 power engineering, also called 3 power systems engineering, is 4 subfield of 5 engineering that deals with 6 generation, transmission and distribution of 7 electric power as well as 8 electrical devices connected to such systems including 9 generators, motors and transformers. Although much of 10 field is concerned with 11 problems of 12 three-phase AC power – 13 standard for 14 large-scale power transmission and distribution across 15 modern world – 16 significant fraction of 17 field is concerned with 18 conversion between 19 AC and DC power as well as 20 development of 21 specialized power systems such as those used in 22 aircraft or for 23 electric railway networks.

(From: [http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Power engineering](http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Power_engineering))

2.

1 English Teaching Robot

Call it 2..... job terminator. South Korea, which employs some 30,000 foreigners to teach 3..... English, has plans for 4 new addition to its language classroom: 5 English speaking robot. 6 students in a few schools started learning 7..... English from 8 robo-teachers late 9 last year; by 10 end of this year, 11 government hopes to have them in 18 more schools. 12 brightly coloured, squat androids are 13 part of 14 effort to keep 15 South Korean students competitive in English. Not surprisingly, 16 proposal has worried 17..... few human teachers – and with 18 good reason. 19 experts say 20 bots could eventually phase out 21 flesh-and-blood foreign English teachers altogether.
(From Time, November 22, 2010, p. 50)

3.

1 Straddling Bus
2 boom in 3 car sales has caused 4 traffic mayhem in many of 5 China's major cities. One company wants to improve 6 situation – by putting even more people on 7 road. But rather than add more cars, 8 Shenzhen Huashi Future Parking Equipment is developing 9 massive "straddling bus". Cheaper than 10 subway, 11 partly solar-powered behemoth will span two lanes and carry up to 1,200 people in 12 carriage raised 2m above 13 roadway, thus allowing 14 cars to pass, or be passed, underneath. 15 passengers on 16 new bus should rightly expect to feel above it all. 17 company is awaiting 18 government approval for 19 trial project in Beijing. If that comes through this year, 20 test runs should begin by 21. end of 2011.
(From Time, November 22, 2010, p. 54)