English Articles in the Limelight

Presented by Alison Sattler on May 12, 2016

Note: *Per Ellen's request, this presentation has been revised to include all relevant information about English articles into the following categories: Form, Meaning and Use.*
Additional information on the 5 articles (a, an, the, some and "zero" or "null") is included after the "Use" category.

FORM

How do we teach ELLs how and when to say or write:

- ➤"a" or "an"
- ➤"the"
- ➤"some"
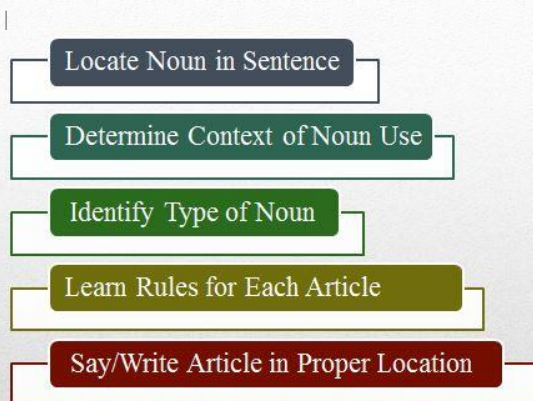
or ➤*nothing at all* before a noun?

First, they need to be able to locate & classify the noun it modifies.

Teaching ELLs How to Use Articles

ELLs need to learn the skills listed at right to be able to say and write articles proficiently.

Native English speakers intuitively understand how to use articles. Therefore, they/we will need to know the rules governing articles' use as well.

Locate Noun in Sentence

Determine Context of Noun Use

Identify Type of Noun

Learn Rules for Each Article

Say/Write Article in Proper Location

ELL's Road to Mastering Article Usage

The Learning Process for ELLs

Slide 1

The basic rule for determining what article to use is to identify the noun it modifies. Is it:

- common or not?
- countable or not?
- singular or not?
- concrete or not?
- proper or not?

and that's just for starters!

Noun

Common Nouns

Proper Nouns

Countable Nouns

*Mass Nouns

Name of Person, Place or Thing

Concrete Noun

Abstract Noun

*Also called "Noncount Nouns"

Match Article to the Noun it Modifies

Slide 2

Definite (shared reference)   **Indefinite (unknown reference)**

the   /ðə/ _C
       /ðiy/ _V

a   __C

an   __V

some

zero

to signal a familiar noun
1) from **shared context**;
2) defined by its **modifiers**
   (e.g. **the** black cat)
3) from *inference
   (e.g. **the** bathroom sink)
4) is **unique** (e.g. **the** Earth;
if N is a superlative /-est/)
       AND
for plural proper noun

to introduce a **new topic**
OR
to talk in **general terms**
OR
to **define or characterize** someone/thing

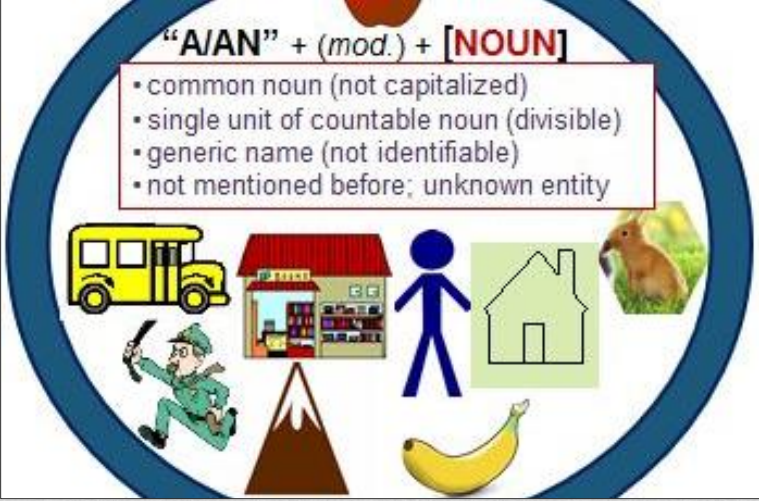to narrow definition of mass noun and make plural indef. count noun

to make a generalization or categorical statement

Definite & Indefinite Articles

At a Glance: "A" and "An"

Indefinite Article "Some"

Zero Article – Definite and Indefin.
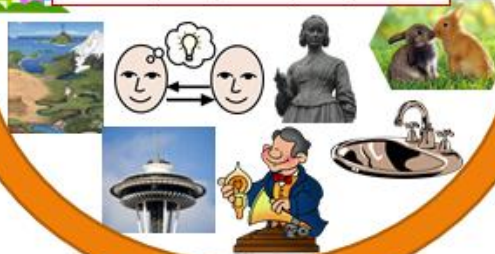
Definite Article "The"

MEANING

THE	A	SOME	AN
#1	#5	#32	#48

Articles (also called noun determiners) play a supportive role in English phrases and sentences, developing the lofty nouns' character so we, the directors and audience, can follow along as the drama unfolds.

While native English speakers fail to recognize the importance of articles' contributions to our understanding of the plot, ELLs see them as a force to be reckoned with given their enormous stage presence. (*See table above for their rank in a list of most-used English words.*)

"*I Get No Respect!*" -- English Article

http://www.world-english.org/english500.htm

USE

Indefinite
(What (noun)?   Who is it?)

Definite
(What (noun)?   Which ones?)

a/an Singular Count "A big house."

the All Common & Plural Proper. "The World Series starts tomorrow."

some Plural Count; Mass "Can I have some cookies?

zero Singular Proper "Freedom is priceless."

zero Plural Count & Mass "Bicycles are popular in China."

Examples: How to Use Each Article

Use "**some**" when referring to:
- nonspecific persons, places, things or concepts
- an unspecified small number of a count noun, e.g. "*I have <u>some</u> candy*."
- a moderate amount of a mass noun, e.g. "*Would you like <u>some</u> coffee?*"
- something known in nonspecific terms, i.e. "*There's <u>some</u> milk in the fridge?*"
- to say something politely ("*Can I give you <u>some</u> advice?*"

Using Indefinite "Some"

Use corpus data to design lessons, i.e. conversation vs. writing.

Most Common Reason for Using "The"	Spoken (Conv)	Fiction (Text)	Information (Text)
Previously Introduced	25%	30%	25-30%
Shared Situational Context	55%	10%	10%
Modifiers of the Noun	5%	15%	30-40%
Inference	5%	10%	15%
Other	10%	35%	10%

Source: <u>Real Grammar: A Corpus-Based Approach to English</u> (Conrad S & Biber D, 2009)

Use of "The" in Discourse

Also use "**the**" when referring to:
- countries with names using "United," "Kingdom," "Union," "Republic" and that end in "-s"
- geographic parts of the globe and geographic areas, deserts and peninsulas
- parts of something *except for body parts*
- names of buildings/statues/bridges and other human-made structures
- inventions
- bodies of water *except for individual lakes*
- with ordinal numbers (i.e. *the* first floor)

Additional Rules for Using "The"

An **abstract noun** names a quality or idea. For example: friendship, trust, democracy and liberty.

We need to know whether a noun is abstract vs. concrete because the ***zero article** **modifies abstract nouns** while the other articles modify concrete nouns.

Example: *Also known as the **"null" article***

"(Ø) *Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.*"

In the phrase above, "beauty" is abstract because it is a quality that can't be defined universally.

9

Use **zero (Ø) article** when referring to:
- titles, i.e. Mr./Ms. /Dr./President
- names of persons
- place names
- continents
- countries (except "plural")
- lakes
- individual mountains
- specific courses (i.e. Chemistry)
- dates, month, years
- holidays
- languages
- nationalities
- majors or degrees
- titles of books, articles,
- religions

Rules for Using the Zero Article

PROBLEMS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

- Using **"A"** before words that start with "eu" and "u", but have the **/y/ consonant sound,** e.g. "ukulele" and "unicorn".

- Using **"An"** before words beginning with a "**Silent H**" but followed with a vowel sound, e.g. "honest."

- Forgetting to use an "a" or "an" before a single count noun.

NOTE*: Articles lead all other adjectives and modifiers before the noun they modify.*

Common ELL Errors with "A" & "An"

- Using **"the"** with a plural noun that refers to a whole category.
- Using **"the"** with abstract nouns or ideas, i.e. *****"*The silence is golden.*"
- Overusing **"the"** when wanting to refer to a whole category of something, i.e. *****"*The basketball is my favorite sport.*"

Common ELL Errors with "The"

The following languages either don't have articles or use them differently than they are used in English:

- **Arabic:** Uses only definite article ("the") and does so with abstract nouns as well as whole group nouns, i.e. *The beauty is in the eye…* & *I am afraid of the spiders.*
- **Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Russian:** Don't use articles.
- **French and Spanish:** Use definite article similarly as in Arabic. Do not use indefinite article with professions. Have sing/pl forms for both def. & indef. articles.

Special Populations

ACTIVITIES FOR INTRODUCING LESSON

ACTIVITY #1 (DEMO)

"a" "an" *zero* (Ø) or "the"?

1. T pulls out 1 apple from bag, holds it, and asks Ss: *"What is it?"* Writes answer on brd.

2. T repeats #1 /w orange, pear & banana. Then, T asks Ss to ID L pattern ("a" vs. "an").

3. Next, T pulls out 2nd apple; shows both apples & asks "*What are these?*" Writes answer on brd & repeats /w other fruit & asks Ss to ID pattern ("a"/"an" sg N vs. Ø pl N)

4. T introduces next grammar point (use "a"/"an"/Ø for 1st mention Ns and "the" thereafter) by picking up a piece of fruit and putting it on a student's desk. Asks Ss: "*What did I do?*". Does same for 1 and 2 pieces of fruit. This time, T *doesn't* write answer on board. Instead, asks Ss if they can ID different L usage ("Can you tell me what you said that was different this time?" or "What did you say when I showed you 1 apple?" "What did you say when I showed you 2 apples?" "What did you say when I put it on the desk?") *T tries to get Ss to recall info first before putting pattern on board because it helps Ss retain info better if they have more difficulty retrieving it while learning it…*

Card Game: "Do you have _____?"

1. Students start with 6 cards from desk of picture cards of nouns for all articles (desk has matching sets)
2. To take a turn, the 1st player draws a card and asks partner: "*Do you have (a/an/the/some or Ø) ____?*" to try to get a match for one of her/his cards in hand.
3. If gets a set, player continues to ask questions using cards in hand until unable to make a match.
4. Partner draws a card and play continues as before.
5. Game ends when deck runs out.
6. The layer with most sets wins.
(NOTE: Game is like "Old Maid")

Pairs Card Game (Alternate or Review)

REFRESHER COURSE
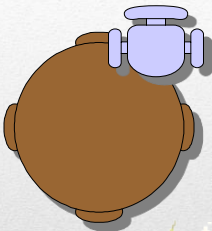
IDENTIFYING TYPES OF NOUNS

5/17/2016

What do you call these nouns?
Why?
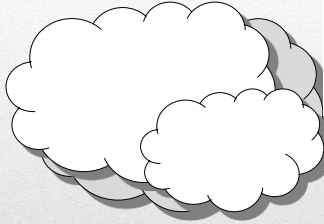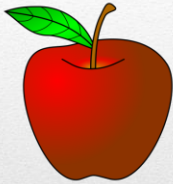
Quiz: Name that Noun

Which of these nouns are mass (noncount) vs. collective (count)?

Quiz: Mass vs. Collective Common Nouns

What do you call these nouns?
Why?

Quiz: Name that Noun

One more:

What is the difference between a "concrete" and an "abstract" noun?

Why do you think this matters?

Concrete vs. Abstract Noun

A **concrete noun** names something that can be seen or touched (just like concrete!). They are most often countable nouns, but not always.

Semantically, concrete nouns fall into the follow four categories:
1. Mass nouns
2. Liquids and gasses
3. Raw or basic materials
4. Categorical terms for classes of similar objects

Concrete nouns include **collective nouns**, such as:

furniture   team   panel   equipment