Section 11  articles

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language notes

The correct use of articles is one of the most difficult points of English grammar, especially for students whose languages don’t have an equivalent (see page 151). Typical mistakes:
- *Where is station?*
- *I need the new raincoat.*

Speakers of Western European languages, which have article systems, have less difficulty (and will not need to study all of the following pages), but there are some differences which can cause such students to get things wrong in English – for example when they are saying what jobs people do, or when they are generalising:
- *My sister is engineer.*
- *The life is hard.*

The rules given in this Section will help learners to be more correct, but not all uses of articles fit into simple patterns; the correct use in some common expressions has to be learnt on a case by case basis. (Compare *on the radio* – *on TV.*) It’s important not to be perfectionist in this area: if students end up getting most of their articles right most of the time, they will communicate successfully, and too much correction can destroy confidence. (In fact, there are relatively few article mistakes that cause serious comprehension problems.)

possible further activities

Texts  There are examples of all important article uses (including ‘no article’) on this page. It’s best if students just read the texts for interest as an introduction to the topic, without thinking hard about the grammar at this stage. After they have worked through the following pages, you might like to come back to these texts again and get students to think about the reasons for the different uses.

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possible further activities

‘A’ or ‘an’  If students need more practice on this, you could do Exercise 2 again orally. (They close their books; you say the phrases and adjectives.)

Extending Exercise 4  This is an opportunity to teach some more common nouns. Teach the names of some other useful things; students write sentences saying what they are used for. (Help with vocabulary.)

Miming objects  Students in turn pretend to be holding or using objects, showing what they are by actions without speaking. (For example stroking a cat, looking up a word in a dictionary, breaking an egg, putting on shoes ….) The class say what they think is being illustrated. (‘It’s a cat.’ ‘They’re shoes.’)
language notes

This lesson may not be very useful for speakers of Western European languages, which use articles with countable and uncountable nouns in much the same way as English. However, note that some uncountable English words have countable equivalents in some other languages (see page 198 for details), so students may use them with *a/an:

*Can you give me an advice?
*We made a long travel in America last year.

possible further activities

Vocabulary expansion Extend Exercises 1 and 2 by teaching some more words in each group. Students have to decide whether to put *a/an or nothing with them.

Materials (See also page 165 for a similar exercise.) More vocabulary expansion: get students to think of more things that are made of the materials in Exercise 3 – provide vocabulary as necessary. You can also teach some more names of materials (e.g. steel, rubber, paper, cardboard, silver, gold, aluminium, brass), and get students to write sentences saying what things are made of them. Can they say what everything in the classroom is made of? (Note the difference between *made of and *made from in cases like This table is made of wood / Paper is made from wood.)

Advertisements Ask students to find (in magazines or on the internet) five or more advertisements with countable nouns, and five or more with uncountable nouns.

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language notes

This lesson, too, has little value for speakers of Western European languages: they have no trouble in general handling *a/an and *the and the difference between them, though they may have problems in particular cases.

possible further activities

Beginning stories Get students to change some or all of the italicised words in the following story-opening in as many ways as possible, while keeping everything else the same. Help with vocabulary.

Once there was a *beautiful princess who lived in a *big palace. *She had a *big horse and a *very small dog. The *horse was called *Angel, and the *dog was called *Button. The *princess was unhappy because *her big sisters were very unkind to *her.

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possible further activities

Miming jobs Teach the names of a few more jobs if students are ready for some extra vocabulary. Then get them to take turns miming a job; the rest of the class decide which job is being mimed and say ‘You’re a …’. You may like to give out cards with the names of the jobs (so that they all have different ones).

Students’ descriptions Get students to write descriptions of themselves. Depending on the class, you might also be able to get students to write (reasonably polite) descriptions of each other; they read them out and the others have to guess who is being described.

➔ Section 11 continues
Celebrities  More advanced students might write short notes about well-known people (for example entertainers or fashion models), saying what they do and describing their appearance.

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possible further activities

Extending Exercise 3  Get students to write more generalisations about men and women. Help with vocabulary.

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possible further activities

Personalisation  Get students to write the names of five different kinds of place they have visited or seen (e.g. a country, a city, a lake, a mountain, a famous building); five they would like to visit or see; and/or five that a visitor to their country should visit or see.

Geographical knowledge.  Say or write up the names of various well-known buildings, rivers, lakes, mountains, etc. Students write or say sentences about where they are. Help with vocabulary. (‘The Parthenon is in Greece.’ ‘Mount Fuji is in Japan.’)

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possible further activities

Personalisation  Get students to write as many sentences as possible about themselves in ten minutes, using expressions from the lesson (e.g. have breakfast, on Tuesday, in hospital, by train, without a ticket, the same, the country, a hundred, the cinema).

Where are we?  Students (individually or in groups) act little scenes illustrating expressions from the lesson (in hospital, at the cinema etc). They can speak, but mustn’t use the key words. The other students decide where they are. (‘You’re in prison.’)