

English A2 · Articles

Elementary English for Chinese speakers; classroom examples, not official exam items.

The ticket and the spotlight

a introduces a stranger; the greets an old friend; zero article speaks to everyone at once.

the: four spotlights

Situation	Example
second mention	I saw a dog. The dog was big.
shared knowledge	Close the door. — we both see it
unique things	the sun, the moon, the internet
superlatives and order	the tallest boy, the first day

Use the evidence

The sun is always an old friend: there is only one.

Your turn: stranger or old friend

Your turn

I bought a book yesterday. ____ book is about pandas.

- ☐ A. A
- ☐ B. The
- ☐ C. An
- ☐ D. No article

The zero article

Category	Example
plurals in general	Dogs are friendly. Books are expensive.
uncountables in general	I like music. Water is important.
names	China, Beijing, Lin
meals and routines	have lunch, go to school, go to bed

Use the evidence

Exceptions keep the: the Yangtze, the Alps, the United States.

Your turn: general or specific

Your turn

I like ____ dogs.

- A. the
- B. a
- C. no article
- D. an

The decision tree

Does the listener know exactly which one? Yes → the.



No → is it one countable thing? Yes → a/an.



Plural, uncountable or general → zero article.



I need a pen. Where is the pen? Pens are useful.

Institution or building

institution — zero article

go to school — as a student

in hospital — as a patient

building — the

go to the school — to visit the building

at the hospital — visiting someone

Your turn: the automatic spotlight

Your turn

Which is correct for a general truth?

- ☐ A. The cats are calm animals.
- ☐ B. Cats are calm animals.
- ☐ C. A cats are calm animals.
- ☐ D. An cats is calm.

Say it aloud

Tell a two-sentence story: I saw a cat this morning. The cat was sitting on my homework.



Continue: The homework is unfinished. The cat is unbothered.



Add a stranger: A stranger knocked.
The stranger wanted directions.



Close with truth: Cats are calm. Homework is doomed. The sun will rise on both.

Check yourself

- I saw a dog. The dog was big. — stranger, then old friend.
- Dogs are friendly. — general plural, zero article.
- Close the door. — shared knowledge, the spotlight.
- She goes to school by bus. — a student, an institution, zero.