

Test Yourself

Use the information you have learned about the definite article “the” and complete the following questions.

Add definite articles where necessary.

1. *I spoke to manager.*
2. *She went to pick up some things at store.*
3. *I'll take you to airport.*
4. *Boss is coming in to see you this morning.*
5. *That was best trip of my life!*
6. *Wow! Look at moon tonight.*
7. *Let's take subway. It's fastest way.*
8. *Dog, which ran past my office, came back.*

Remove the unnecessary definite articles.

1. *The man with the hat took the bus to the work.*
2. *I like the milk.*
3. *I like the hat that you bought at the store.*
4. *Would you like the coffee?*

Book an appointment with Student Academic Learning Services to check your answers to these questions or ask more questions about using definite articles.



If you need more help, make an appointment with us at...

Student Academic Learning Services

Phone: 905.721.2000 ext. 2491

Email: sals@durhamcollege.ca

or

visit our front desk in room 204,
Student Services Building (SSB)

Student Academic Learning Services

Using “The”

The

The word “*the*” is called a **definite article** in English grammar because it always refers to a **specific noun** that is **known** by both the **writer** and the **reader**.

For example:

*A dog ran past my office yesterday. **The** dog came back again this morning.*

If I tell you about a dog that ran past my office yesterday, the first time I mention it, I must use “**a** dog” because it was one non-specific dog and you did not know about it.

After the first mention, however, the dog becomes known because I told you about it in the first sentence. The dog is now specific and known by both me (the writer) and you (the reader).

For every noun, you must consider if it needs an article (**a/an, the, or nothing**). If the noun is non-specific and singular (countable) such as *dog* or *apple*, it will need the **indefinite article** “a/an”. However, if the noun is non-specific and plural (countable) such as *chairs*, or uncountable such as *milk*, you will not add an article before the noun. For every noun, countable or uncountable, that is specific (both the writer and reader know the same noun), the **definite article** “the” will be used before the noun.

On the following page, you will see a variety of situations, with examples, where the definite article “the” should be used.

Use “the”

When knowledge of the situation or context is shared between the writer and reader or speaker and listener

***The** Prime Minister is returning tomorrow.
The test was difficult.
 He works at **the** college.*

When the nouns are unique

***the** sun / **the** earth / **the** sky / **the** moon...*

Before superlative adjectives

***the** most important book / **the** biggest room /
the least interesting movie / **the** best trip...*

Before unique adjectives that make the noun specific

***the** main reason / **the** principle concern / **the** first choice / **the** primary cause / **the** only way /
the same idea*

With nouns that include well-known things and technologies

*Did you check **the** answering machine?
 He takes **the** bus to school.
 I listen to **the** radio on my way to work.*

Before places with well-known activities

***the** gym / **the** store / **the** beach / **the** library*

When nouns become identifiable by being followed by a dependant clause (who/which/that) or a prepositional phrase beginning with of/in/to...

***The** average number of people is four.
 Payment is due on **the** first day of the month.
The worker, who started yesterday, seems nice.
The business trip to Toronto was successful.*

	Specific (the) Definite article	the dog (one specific dog) the apple (one specific apple)	the dogs (those specific dogs) the apples (those specific apples)	the milk (that specific milk)
	General (a or an) Indefinite article	a dog (one non-specific dog) an apple (one non-specific apple)	(nothing) dogs (any dogs) (nothing) apples (any apples)	(nothing) milk (any milk)
Countable nouns Singular (one)				
Countable nouns Plural (two or more)				
Uncountable nouns				