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# **ENGLISH GRAMMAR**

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## 1. THE ARTICLE

The definition of the article in English is very general and does not go beyond the following: *"articles are determinatives which serve to give precision to the nouns/noun equivalents to which they are attached. On the other hand, the definite article **the** is by far the commonest word in English, and with **a** and **an** makes up 8.5% of all text"* (Berry, 1993: V). Along with prepositions, the article is, probably, the most difficult part of speech to master and use in English. The forms are not difficult, but what is a real nuisance is the fact that the uses of the various articles in English are very different from the uses of the equivalent articles in other languages.

As articles in English can only function as determinatives of nouns/noun equivalents and are never used alone, some linguists argue that they should not even be considered an independent part of speech and never be treated as such. The view is relatively correct and, theoretically, this approach might be successful, but for practical purposes, it is far easier and simpler to accept the old tradition of the article as a separate part of speech and deal with it monographically as we intend to do with all the other morphological classes in English. It is also true that this approach will inevitably lead to interferences with nouns and other parts of speech. We hope, though, that the result will be worth studying.

At the present stage of language development, ***the article in English is an invariable part of speech*** - which is a positive characteristic of a language. As far as its position is concerned, be it definite or indefinite, it is proclitical, i.e. it is placed before the noun/noun equivalent it determines. In certain approaches (Levičhi, 1970: 61-66) the authors identify 3 types of articles, the definite article, the indefinite article and the zero article and within each class other subclasses, e.g. anaphoric, generic, anticipatory, numerical, non-significant etc. For practical reasons we prefer to disregard these classifications and go only for definite and indefinite articles and within each type of article to describe the uses of the article or where it is not used.

## 1.1. THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

As far as its origin is concerned, the definite article goes back to a demonstrative adjective and pronoun, which in Old English had both the meaning of Modern English *that* and *the meanings and functions of the definite article* (Levičhi, 1970: 60).

### 1.1.1. FORM

The definite article is the same for singular and plural and for all genders, for animate and inanimate nouns, e.g. *the boy, the boys, the girl, the girls, the table, the tables, the writing, the writings, the dog, the dogs* etc.

The definite article has an invariable form in writing, **THE**, but it is pronounced differently, depending on the initial sound of the following word. It is pronounced [e̞] before consonants and semivowels and [ɛi] before vowels, e.g.

*The* [ðə] *dog is a friendly animal.*

*The* [ðə] *girls have already left.*

*The* [ðə] *definite article is not difficult.*

or

*The* [ði] *interior has been redecorated recently.*

*He was heading for the* [ði] *other flight of stairs when somebody called out his name.*

*She put the* [ði] *apple on the shelf.*

#### NOTE:

It is the **sound, not the spelling** of the next word that matters, e.g. **o** is a vowel, but it is pronounced as a semivowel, [w], in words like:

one [wʌn],

once [wʌns]

e.g. (to give smb. *the* [ðə] once-over, just *the* [ðə] one, *the* [ðə] one/s, *the* [ðə] one-horse, *the* [ðə] one-man band, *the* [ðə] one way, *the* [ðə] one-sided).

*He was driving slowly on the* [ðə] *one-way street, trying to find her house.*

*The* [ðə] *one you gave me was blue.*

U is also a vowel, but it is pronounced as a semivowel, [j], in the following words:

ubiquity [ju:'biwiti]	unitarian [ju:ni'tæriən]
ubiquitous [ju:'biqwitəs]	unit ['ju:nit]
udometer [ju:'dɒmitə]	united [ju:'naitid]
UFO ['ju:fəu]	unity ['ju:niti]
ufology [ju:'fɔlədʒi]	universal [ˌju:ni'vɜ:səʊl]
Ukraine [ju:'krein]	universe ['ju:nivɜ:s]
ukulele [ju:kju'leli]	university [ˌju:ni'vɜ:siti]
UN [ju:en]	uranium [ju:'reiniəm]
unanimous [ju:'næniməs]	ureter [ju:'ri:tə]
unanimity [ju:nə'nimiti]	urethra [ju:'ri:θrə]
unicorn ['ju:niko:n]	urinalysis [ˌjuəri'nælisɪs]
uniform ['ju:nifo:m]	urine ['ju:rain]
uniformed ['ju:nifo:md]	use [ju:s]
uniformity [ju:ni'fo:miti]	useful ['ju:sfʊl]
unification [ˌju:nifi'keɪʃn]	useless ['ju:sləs]
unilateral [ˌju:ni'læterəl]	user ['ju:zə]
union [ju:niən]	usual ['ju:ʒuəl]
unionist ['ju:njənɪst]	uterus ['ju:tərəs]
unionize ['ju:njənɪzɪz]	utility [ju:'tɪlɪti]
uniparous [ju:'nɪpərəs]	utilization [ˌju:tɪlaɪ'zeɪən]
uniped [ju:'nɪped]	utopia [ju:'təʊpiə]
unipod [ju:'nɪpod]	utopian [ju:'təʊpiən]
unipolar [ˌju:ni'pəʊlə]	uvula ['ju:vjʊlə]
unisex [ju:nɪseks]	

The correct pronunciation of the definite article in front of these words is [ðə] and not otherwise. The mispronunciation of the definite article in this position is very common with non-native speakers, e.g. in the following examples, some beginners pronounce the definite article as [ði] instead of [ðə] as they should, misled by the fact that the noun following the definite article begins in a vowel, **u**, never considering its pronunciation. So, the next examples are meant to prove the point:

*She goes to **the** [ðə] university every day.*

***The** [ðə] United States of America fight terrorism.*

***The** [ðə] uterus is the place where the child develops.*

The letter **w** in initial position is pronounced as a semivowel, [w], and, the definite article is pronounced [ðə], e.g.

waffle [wɒfl]

warden ['wɔ:dən]

wager ['weɪdʒə]

warm-up ['wɔ:mʌp]

wagon ['wæɡ ən]

warrant ['wɔr ənt]

waistband ['weɪstbænd]

warship ['wɔ: ʃɪp]

waiter ['weɪtə]

watch [wɒtʃ]

walker ['wɔ:kə]

wealth [welθ]

wall [wɔ:l]

web [web]

war [wɔ:]

There are 4 words and their derivatives in English beginning in **h**, which is never pronounced. consequently, the definite article is pronounced [ðɪ] in front of these words. These base words are:

heir [eə]

honest ['ɒnəst]

honour [ɒnə]

hour [aʊə]

*He was the first of the heirs [ðɪ eəz].*

*The honest [ðɪ ɒnəst] participant is always rewarded.*

*The honour [ðɪ ɒnə] of the participants has never been questioned.*

*It was the hour [ðɪ aʊə] of truth.*

In Modern English there is a large number of words obtained from initials, and the pronunciation of the definite article is [ðɪ] in front of abbreviations beginning in the consonants **f, h, l, m, n, r, s**, which are pronounced with a vowel [ef/eɪf/el/em/en/a:/ es] e.g. **FA** (= Football Association), **FAA** (= Fleet Air Arm), **FAO** (= Food and Agriculture Organization), **FBA** (= Fellow of British Academy), **FBI** (= Federal Bureau of Investigation), **FCO** (= Foreign and Commonwealth Office), **F-layer** (the highest and most strongly ionised region of the ionosphere), **f.o.r.** (= free on rail), **FP** (=

= freezing point), **FPA** (= Family Planning Association), **FRS** (= Fellow of Royal Society), **HB** [= hard black (pencil lead)], **HBM** [= Her/His Britannic Majesty(s)], **H-bomb** (= hydrogen bomb), **HCF** (= 1. highest common factor. 2. Honorary Chaplain of the Forces), **HF** (= high frequency), **H-hour** (= the hour at which an operation is scheduled to begin), **HMS** (= Her/His Majesty's Ship), **HT** (= high tension), **LBC** (= London Broadcasting Company), **LCD** (= 1. liquid crystal display. 2. lowest common denominator), **LCM** (= lowest common multiple), **L-plate** (= a sign bearing the letter L, attached to the front and rear of a motor vehicle to indicate that it is being driven by a learner), **LPO** (= London Philharmonic Orchestra), **LSD** (= lysergic acid diethylamide, a potent hallucinogenic and psychedelic drug), **MA** (= Master of Arts), **MB** (= Bachelor of Medicine), **MBA** (= Master of British Administration), **MD** (= 1. Doctor of Medicine/Medicinae Doctor. 2. Managing Director), **MGM** (= Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, a film company formed in 1924 by Samuel Goldwyn and Louis B. Mayer), **MI5** (= in the UK, Military Intelligence, section 5), **MI6** (= Military Intelligence, section 6), **m.o.** (= modus operandi), **MOD** (= Ministry of Defence), **NBC** (= National Broadcasting Company), **NI** (= 1. National Insurance. 2. Northern Ireland), **NSA** (= National Security Agency), **RAF** (= Royal Air Force), **RIP** (= may he/she/they rest in peace < L requiescat/requiescant in pace), **RMA** (= Royal Military Academy), **RNA** (= ribonucleic acid), **RSPCA** (= Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), **SA** (= 1. Salvation Army. 2. sex appeal), **SIS** (= Secret Intelligence Service), **SOS** (= save our souls. an international code-signal of extreme distress and urgent appeal for help).

However, if these terms consisting of more than one word are pronounced extensively, i.e. pronouncing all the words they consist of, the definite article is pronounced, where necessary, [ðə] as in front of **boy, chair, report, dog, king, head, foot, house, restaurant** etc.

The pronunciation of the definite article **the** is usually weak, [ðə], but it also has a stressed pronunciation, [ði], that is used in other instances, e.g.

- when the definite article becomes a noun by conversion and is used as a subject, for instance, in a sentence:

**THE** [ði] is the definite article in English.

- when it acquires an emphatic form because the speaker wants to contrast it with another element:

I want **THE** [ði] book I lent you not just any English book (= I want a special book, not just any book).

- sometimes it may get the force of a superlative:  
*Shakespeare is THE [ði] poet* (= Shakespeare este poetul prin excelență).
- when an orator needs to make a pause for effect, and, accidentally, this is done on the definite article, he/she may choose to pronounce it [ði] in order to avoid
- something that might sound close to the unpleasant habit of filling one's pauses in speech with [əəəəəəəəəəəəəəəəəə].
- this emphatic pronunciation also draws the audience's attention that something important may follow or, simply, draw their straying away attention to the orator.

### 1.1.2. POSITION

The definite article stands

- before a noun, e.g. *the student, the university, the food, the stadium, the attention, the development* etc.
- before modifiers, e.g. *the nice book, the best book, the first competitor, the second interview* etc. or
- other determinatives or pronouns, e.g. *the other delegate, the same interest, the others* etc.
- in *George the Fifth, Jude the Obscure, Richard the Lion-Hearted, Alfred the Great, Stephen the Great, Canto the Third* the position of the definite article is justified by the fact that the adjective or ordinal numeral is used postpositionally for emphasis and then the definite article precedes them in a very logical way. In the author's opinion it is not correct to say that the definite article can be used in postposition, because, actually, in the examples above the definite article determines the numeral or the adjectives, which themselves are used in post position for emphatic

purposes, and not the proper noun (which is not normally used with the definite article)/common noun that has the first position.

### 1.1.3. THE USES OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

**1.1.3.1.** The definite article is used to show that the noun/noun equivalent has already been mentioned previously, either in the same sentence or earlier in the course of communication, (what in some books is referred to as anaphoric) e.g.

*They have **a son** and two daughters, but **the son** is an adult person and already has a family of his own.*

*My mother bought **a new dress** yesterday, but **the dress** was so expensive that she changed her mind and took it back today.*

*My friends had **a house** built not far from ours. **the house** is made of brick and glass.*

*This book is a study of the development of the meaning of **music**. It is **not history**, but it must necessarily approach the subject historically, giving an idea of the way in which **the art** (this/that art, music) has taken on new experiences, problems and ideas. (S. Finkelstein, How Music Expresses Ideas).*

*There were only a few girls in the classroom, of which one was sitting in the last row of desks because nobody wanted to talk to **the girl**.*

- There are also set phrases in which the definite article refers back to, something which was not mentioned previously, but which the speaker knows about or can identify easily, e.g.

*at the (that) time,*

*under the (these/those) circumstances,*

*nothing of the (this) kind,*

*to rise to the (this/that) occasion etc.*

- The speaker/reader may sometimes refer to an object/objects already known to the former, to current notions known to the interlocutors, or to objects that are singularly identifiable under the circumstances, e.g.

*Have you read the newspaper?* (= the newspaper that our family usually buys and reads).

*Have you locked the door?* (= the door to our home).

*Turn on the radio!* (= the radio we have in the house).

*The telephone is ringing.* (= probably the phone in the house).

**1.1.3.2.** There is a special class of objects or groups of objects of which there is or we assume there is only one in the context, e.g. *the sun, the moon, the earth, the sea, the ocean, the North Pole, the South Pole, the equator, the Renaissance, the human race* etc. or *the kitchen, the city hall, the Queen, the last president* etc. All could be made more definite, e.g. the sun belonging to the Earth, the North Pole of the Earth, the kitchen of this house, the queen of the country etc. Normally these explanations are unnecessary.

**1.1.3.3.** When a noun comes after a preposition, the definite article is almost always necessary, the sequence **preposition + definite article + noun** is a very common structure, e.g. *under the table, on the wall, in the street, in the sky, in the field, after the lesson, behind the door, beyond the river, near the village, for the children, through the gates, at the museum, from the park, on the floor, into the drawer, on the way, by the way* etc.

**1.1.3.4.** The definite article appears in certain set phrases and the readers are advised never to question these uses, only accept and use them as such. It is, probably, the moment to say that not all language structures have a clear and straightforward explanation! Usage is not infrequently the only logical explanation! E.g. *to get the upper hand, to break the ice, to take the trouble, all the time, to tell the time, what's the time? to paint the devil blacker than he is, to join the colours, to have the time of one's life* etc.

**1.1.3.5.** The definite article can also display a generic function. It shows that the noun/noun equivalent is used in its most general sense. The general sense of a noun/noun equivalent can be rendered in various ways, the definite article being one of them along with the indefinite article (see under

indefinite article) and the non-use of article (see under **the definite article is no used**).

It can be used with individual nouns in the singular, e.g.

*The dog is a friendly animal.*

*The article is a part of speech.*

*The tiger is one of the big cats.*

*The Siberian tiger is in danger of becoming extinct etc.*

Sometimes all three forms can be used alternatively, e.g. *The dog is a friendly animal* = *A dog is a friendly animal* = *Dogs are friendly animals*, while in other situations the meaning prevents the use of all 3 forms, e.g. *The Siberian tiger is in danger of becoming extinct* has an alternative form in *Siberian tigers are in danger of becoming extinct*. The indefinite article may discharge a generic function, e.g. *\*A Siberian tiger is in danger of becoming extinct* but it is unacceptable because of the illogical meaning of such a construction: the death of one animal cannot endanger the whole species. To conclude, countable nouns can take any of the following forms, i.e. a definite article + a noun in the singular, an indefinite article + a noun in the singular and zero article + a noun in the plural form, depending on what the speaker intends to say. uncountable nouns can only function without any article (or, with the zero article as it is specified in other grammars), i.e.

*Fear is human.*

*Socialising is the main target of a variety of organisations.*

*Presidency has never been easy task.*

**1.1.3.6.** The definite article is also used before nouns made definite by the addition of a clause or a phrase, e.g. *the girl in red dress, the man with the suitcase, the dog with the short tail, the boy who came yesterday, the man (that) I saw, the book (which) Mary bought 2 days ago*. The indefinite article is not forbidden in front of such nouns, but the meaning is different and the speaker should be able to distinguish between the two, e.g.

*I saw a girl in blue crossing the street* (= unidentified) and

*I saw the girl in blue crossing the street* (= previously identified and now reference being made to her).

**1.1.3.7.** The definite article is used before superlatives, e.g.

*The nicest girl in our school is John's friend.*

*Mary is the most beautiful girl I have ever seen.*

*This dictionary is the most expensive I have ever had.*

*Apparently English grammar is the easiest in the world.*

**1.1.3.8.** The definite article is used before ordinal numerals, e.g. *the first, the second, the third, the fifth, the hundredth, the hundred and first, the hundred and second, the one thousand and first, the two thousand two hundred and thirty third, the fifty-seventh* etc.

**1.1.3.9.** The definite article realizes the ***substantivisation of adjectives***. Simple or deverbal (present or past participles) adjectives become nouns when preceded by the definite article, e.g. *the beautiful, the ugly, the poor, the rich, the dead, the grotesque, the quick, the unemployed, the wounded, the living, the disabled* etc.

**1.1.3.10.1.** The definite article and the proper names of persons: proper nouns are understood to have unique reference, e.g. ***Jane, Peter, Mike***, and in a given conversation refer to one particular person. Here no ***the*** comes before the proper noun because the definite meaning is "built" into the noun itself. However, if we need to distinguish between two or more persons having the same name the definite article is used, e.g.

*"I would like to talk to Mr. Smith, please".*

*"Which Mr. Smith do you want to talk to, because we have three".*

*"The Smith from the accounts office, please".*

or

*"Susan came yesterday to ask for an English grammar book".*

*"Which Susan?"*

*"The Susan next door"* (= not the Susan who works in your office).