

From: "THE GOOD GRAMMAR BOOK" by Michael Swan and Catherine Walter
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1) A/an shows that we are talking about 1 person or thing.

We often use **a/an**:

- In descriptions - "She's **an** interesting person" "He's got **a** loud voice."
- When we say **what** something is, or **what** someone's **job** is - "This is **a** return ticket." "I'm **an** engineer."

2) The usually means you *know* which one(s) I'm talking about.

"Can I use **the** phone?" - the listener knows that this means "**your** phone".

We use **the**, not a /an, to talk about somebody or something, when the speaker and listener both know about this person or thing; when they both know which one(s).

- Could you close **the** door (you know which door)
- Could you open **a** window? (I don't mind which one.)
- I'm going to **the** post office (you know which one - the one that is near here.)
- Is there **a** post office near here?

I didn't like **the** film (the one that we saw)

- Nouns used **without** articles often have a special meaning.
- Let's go and see _____ film
- He looked at _____ moon (the only one there is)
- She's in _____ front room (you know which room - I'm telling you)
- I need _____ room for the night
- How much is _____ red coat? (you know which coat - I'm telling you)
- I've just bought _____ new coat

3) We use the before words like *only, first, second etc*

We use **the** before **superlatives** like *oldest, most*:

She's **the only** one for me

It's **the oldest** restaurant in Glasgow

I live on **the second** floor

4) We often use *a/an* to talk about a person or thing for the **first** time
We use *the* when we talk about the person or thing **again**:

A man walked up to *a* policeman. *The* man took out a map and asked *the* policeman

5) We don't use *a /an* with plurals

We can use *the* with plurals : "She's wearing black shoes." " She bought *the* shoes last week."

"I dislike cats." - this means "all cats" - cats in general.

Look at the following exercise. Does it need the /a/ an or does it need no article (-)?

1. Where did you put ____ butter?
2. I speak _____ French.
3. I often listen to _____ music.
4. _____ phone's downstairs in _____ kitchen.
5. She's got _____ nice face and _____ blue eyes.
6. Canada is _____ big country.
7. This table is made of _____ glass.

Is this correct or wrong?

1. She's from the Texas. _____
2. I'm at Oxford Station. _____
3. He was in the bed at 10.00 _____

We do not normally use **the** to talk about people or things in general.

The does not mean **all**.

We use **the** to talk about particular people or things.

Countable and uncountable nouns

Countable nouns are words like: car, book and chair.

They are the names of things that you can count.

You can say: one car, two books, three chairs.

They can be singular (a book, one cat)

They can be plural (two chairs, lots of books)

Uncountable nouns are words like: smoke, rice, water, petrol.

These are things that you can't count.

You can say "smoke"/ "rice"/"water" but not "one smoke"/"two rices"/"three waters"

We often use an uncountable noun (without *a/an*) to say what something is made of: "It's made of glass." "This shirt is made of silk."

Look at these nouns:

Bird bottles blood children flower love meat

mountains music nose oil photos piano river snow

Table river songs

Put these nouns under the right heading:

SINGULAR COUNTABLE	PLURAL COUNTABLE	UNCOUNTABLE

We use a/an before singular countable nouns.

A/an is a bit like saying one.

You can't say one houses or one air.

Put a/an or nothing (_____):

1. Jake's father makes _____ films.
2. I need _____ new bicycle.
3. I never drink _____ milk.
4. Jane is _____ old friend.
5. Their house is made of _____ wood.
6. I often listen to _____ music.
7. The police are looking for him with _____ dogs.
8. My room has got _____ really big window
9. She is wearing _____ skirt

We use one instead of a/an when the exact number is important e.g.

"Can I have a cheese sandwich? No, I asked for one sandwich not two."

"I only want one sandwich."

Put in a/an or one:

She's got _____ nice coat.

She's only got _____ coat.

Can I have _____ boiled egg?

No, I said _____ egg not two.

I've got _____ problem. Can you help?

She's only got _____ child.

John's got _____ beautiful sister.