

## A / an, the and zero article 3

Reminder → 11–19

A

With plural and uncountable nouns, **zero article** (i.e. no article) is used to talk generally, without definite people or things in mind. **The** is used when we assume the listener or reader will understand who or what we are referring to, or when other words in the noun phrase make the reference specific. Compare:

- The government has promised not to tax **books**. (= books generally) *and*
- The books** have arrived. (= the books you ordered)
- Music** played an important part in his life. (= music generally) *and*
- I thought **the music** used in the film was the best part. (= that particular music)

B

We often use **zero article** with the names of holidays, special times of the year, months, and days of the week including **Easter, Ramadan, New Year's Day**. But compare:

- I'll see you on **Saturday**. (= next Saturday)
- We met on **Saturday**. (= last Saturday)
- They came on **a Saturday** as far as I can remember. (we are only interested in the day of the week, not which particular Saturday)
- They came on **the Saturday** after our party. (a particular Saturday, specifying which one)

With **winter, summer, spring, autumn**, and **New Year** (meaning the holiday period), we can use either **zero article** or **the**:

- In **(the) summer** I try to spend as much time as I can in the garden.

We use **the** when it is understood or we go on to specify which summer, spring, etc. we mean:

- I'd like to go skiing in **the autumn**. (= this year)
- I first went skiing in **the spring** of 2002.

We say 'in the New Year' to mean near the beginning of next year:

- I'll see you again in **the New Year**.

When we want to describe the features of a particular holiday, season, or other period of time and say that it was somehow special when compared with others, we can use **It / That was ... + a / an + noun + modifying phrase**. Compare:

- That was **a winter** I'll never forget. (= compared to other winters it was unforgettable) *and*
- That was **the winter** we went to Norway. (= a statement about a particular winter)

C

We use **zero article** with times of the day and night such as **midnight, midday, and noon**:

- If possible, I'd like it finished by **midday**.
- Midnight** couldn't come quickly enough.

But note that we can say either **the dawn** or **dawn**:

- He got back into bed and waited for **(the) dawn**.

We use **the + morning / afternoon / evening** for a day which is understood or already specified:

- I enjoyed **the morning**, but in **the afternoon** the course was boring.

But compare:

- Morning** is the time I work best. (= mornings in general; **The morning ...** is also possible)
- I'll be there **by (the) morning / evening**. (*but ... by the afternoon, not ... by afternoon*)
- I waited **all morning**. (*more usual than all the morning / afternoon, etc.*)
- 'You look upset.' 'Yes, I've had **a terrible morning**.' (= compared to other mornings)

D

We often use **by + zero article** to talk about means of transport and communication. Compare:

- I generally go **by bus** to work. *and*  I generally take **the bus** to work.

**Also: go / travel by car / taxi / bus / plane / train / air / sea; contact / communicate by post / email / phone**

## Exercises

47.1 Complete both sentences in each pair using one word from the box. Add the where necessary. **A**

agriculture children fire holidays islands money parents rain

- 1 a ..... as young as ten are working in the clothing industry.  
b While you're painting the sitting room, I'll take ..... over to the park.
- 2 a As the soil quality deteriorated, so too did ..... on which the region depended.  
b Around 60% of the labour force in the county is supported by .....
- 3 a Around the world ..... are being threatened by rising sea levels.  
b ..... off the east coast of Malaysia are beautiful.
- 4 a I've been really busy at work, so I'm really looking forward to .....  
b ..... in the Brazilian rainforests are now becoming popular with travellers.
- 5 a Farmers will be hoping for ..... in the next few weeks.  
b Last night ..... was torrential.
- 6 a I've left ..... I owe you on your desk.  
b It is said that ..... is the root of all evil.
- 7 a ..... will be able to use this software to check their child's use of the Internet.  
b ..... of Paul Thomas claimed that he was at home at the time of the robbery.
- 8 a It isn't known how ..... started.  
b Animals fear ..... more than anything else.

47.2 Complete the dialogues with a / an, the or zero article (-), whichever is more likely. Where more than one answer is possible, consider any difference in meaning. **B & C**

- 1 A: What's the matter?  
B: I've been working in the garden all ..... afternoon and my back aches.
- 2 A: Can you remember when we last saw Alex?  
B: It was ..... Sunday in June, I think.
- 3 A: When did you get your laptop?  
B: July 15th last year. I remember because it was also ..... day I passed my driving test.
- 4 A: I haven't seen Subin for months. B: He's been away in South Africa for ..... winter.
- 5 A: I've spent ..... afternoon on the phone to my mother. B: Why? Is there a problem?
- 6 A: Shall we go out walking on ..... Sunday? B: No, I'm busy this weekend.
- 7 A: Do you remember when Mateo did all the cooking?  
B: Of course. It was ..... Christmas the rest of us had flu.
- 8 A: I'll see you again after ..... Christmas. B: Okay. Have a good holiday.
- 9 A: That old coat of yours won't be warm enough for ..... winter.  
B: You're right. I need a new one.
- 10 A: Remember when Lars and Ella had that terrible row?  
B: How could I forget? That was ..... day I wouldn't want to go through again.

47.3 Complete the sentences using the words from the box (more than once). Add any other necessary words. **D**

air car email post

- 1 A: I got ..... from Carla yesterday. B: How is she now?
- 2 The train was cancelled so I had to come .....
- 3 Research has found that living plants are efficient at absorbing pollutants in .....
- 4 The application forms came in ..... this morning.
- 5 The exam results will be sent ..... on 24th August.
- 6 It's raining so I think I'll take .....
- 7 A: Shall I send Goran a letter? B: No, the quickest way to get in touch with him is .....
- 8 Thailand – Getting there .....: The main international airport in Thailand is Suvarnabhumi Airport ...