

A/an and the

A

Study this example:

I had a sandwich and an apple for lunch.

The sandwich wasn't very good, but the apple was delicious.



JOHN



KAREN

John says "a sandwich" and "an apple" because this is the first time he talks about them.

John now says "the sandwich" and "the apple" because Karen knows which sandwich and which apple he means – the sandwich and the apple he had for lunch.

Compare a and the in these examples:

- A man and a woman were sitting across from me. **The** man was American, but I think **the** woman was British.
- When we were on vacation, we stayed at a hotel. Sometimes we had dinner at **the** hotel, and sometimes we went to a restaurant.

B

We use **the** when we are thinking of one particular thing. Compare a/an and **the**:

- Tom sat down on a chair. (perhaps one of many chairs in the room)
- but* Tom sat down on **the** chair nearest the door. (a particular chair)
- Ann is looking for a job. (not a particular job)
- but* Did Ann get **the** job she applied for? (a particular job)
- Do you have a car? (not a particular car)
- but* I washed **the** car yesterday. (= my car)

See also Units 68 and 70A.

C

We use **the** when it is clear in the situation which thing or person we mean. For example, in a room we talk about **the** light / **the** floor / **the** ceiling / **the** door / **the** carpet, etc.:

- Can you turn off **the** light, please? (= the light in this room)
- I took a taxi to **the** station. (= the station in that town)
- I'd like to speak to **the** manager, please. (= the manager of this store, etc.)

In the same way, we say (go to) **the** bank / **the** post office:

- I have to go to **the** bank, and then I'm going to **the** post office to get some stamps. (The speaker is usually thinking of a particular bank or post office.)

Also: **the** doctor / **the** dentist / **the** hospital:

- Carol isn't feeling very well. She went to **the** doctor. (= her usual doctor)
- Two people were taken to **the** hospital after the accident.

Compare a:

- Is there a bank near here?
- My sister is a doctor.

D

We say "once a week / three times a day / \$1.20 a pound," etc.:

- "How often do you go to the movies?" "About once a month."
- "How much are those potatoes?" "A dollar a pound."
- She works eight hours a day, six days a week.

Exercises

69.1 Put in a/an or the.

1. This morning I bought a newspaper and _____ magazine.
_____ newspaper is in my briefcase, but I don't know where I put _____ magazine.
2. I saw _____ accident this morning. _____ car crashed into _____ tree.
_____ driver of _____ car wasn't hurt, but _____ car was badly damaged.
3. There are two cars parked outside: _____ blue one and _____ gray one.
_____ blue one belongs to my neighbors; I don't know who _____ owner of _____ gray one is.
4. My friends live in _____ old house in _____ small town. There is _____ beautiful garden behind _____ house. I would like to have _____ garden like that.

69.2 Put in a/an or the.

1. a) This house is very nice. Does it have a yard?
b) It's a beautiful day. Let's sit in _____ yard.
c) I like living in this house, but it's too bad that _____ yard is so small.
2. a) Can you recommend _____ good restaurant?
b) We had dinner in _____ very nice restaurant.
c) We had dinner in _____ most expensive restaurant in town.
3. a) She has _____ French name, but in fact she's English, not French.
b) What's _____ name of that man we met yesterday?
c) We stayed at a very nice hotel. I wish I could remember _____ name!
4. a) There isn't _____ airport near where I live. _____ nearest airport is 70 miles away.
b) Our plane was delayed. We had to wait at _____ airport for three hours.
c) Excuse me, please. Can you tell me how to get to _____ airport?
5. a) "Are you going away next week?" "No, _____ week after next."
b) I'm going away for _____ week in September.
c) George has a part-time job. He works three mornings _____ week.

69.3 Put in a/an or the where necessary.

1. Would you like an apple? an apple
2. How often do you go to dentist? _____
3. Could you close door, please? _____
4. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do that. It was mistake. _____
5. Excuse me, where is bus station, please? _____
6. I have problem. Can you help me? _____
7. I'm just going to post office. I won't be long. _____
8. There were no chairs, so we had to sit on floor. _____
9. Are you finished with book I lent you? _____
10. My sister has just gotten job in bank in Atlanta. _____
11. There's supermarket on corner near my house. _____

69.4 Answer these questions about yourself. Where possible, use the structure in Section D (once a week / three times a day, etc.).

1. How often do you go to the movies? Three or four times a year.
2. How often do you take a vacation? _____
3. What's the usual speed limit on highways in your country? _____
4. How much does it cost to rent a car in your country? _____
5. How much sleep do you need? _____
6. How often do you go out at night? _____
7. How much television do you watch (on average)? _____