



SOME RULES OF 'THE'

	Nouns		the	Examples
Countable nouns	Already mentioned or familiar		✓	She has a dog and a cat. The dog is very cute. Open the door.
	Noun + defining phrase		✓	the story about John the letter I sent you the butterflies of Africa
	Referring to place, time and movement in general		✗	at school by day on foot
	For generalisations relating to people or science and technology		✓	the employee the dolphin the telegram
	Defining phrase + noun		✗	African butterflies eighteenth-century music
	Things unique		✓	the sun the stars
	Musical instruments		✓	the violin
	Days/months/ seasons	general	✗	on Monday; next April
		particular	✓	on the Tuesday after we met
	Years	particular	✗	in 1980
		general	✓	in the 1980s in the 18 th Century
	Jobs and positions	Job titles	✗	President Bush She is Manager of SLSS.
		Person at the position	✓	I want to see the Prime Minister. the President
Uncountable nouns	Well-defined groups of people		✓	the Japanese the police the elderly
	Physical environment	generally known	✓	the weather the sea
		abstract but generally known	✗	I love nature.
Place names	Seas, mountain groups, island groups, rivers, deserts, most hotels, most cinemas and theatres, most museums and art galleries		✓	the Pacific the Waikato River the Southern Alps
	Continents, countries, states, counties, towns, streets, lakes, public buildings, organisations		✗	Africa New Zealand Wellington Airport
	Place names with common nouns like <i>republic</i> , <i>state</i> , <i>union</i> , <i>kingdom</i>		✓	the United States the People's Republic of China



Related resources:

Articles a/an/the
Checklist of Grammar Problems

Student Learning | Te Taiako

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Articles FAQs

1. Do I need an article before an acronym?

An acronym is an abbreviation that makes a pronounceable word, for example **UNESCO** and **MAF**. These words often **DO NOT** require any articles.

2. Shall I put 'the' before 'UN'?

Abbreviations that cannot be pronounced as a word often require **the**. For example, we say **the UN** and **the AA**. However, there is an increasing tendency to drop the article here. When in doubt, ask a native speaker or look at your reading material for guidance.

3. Why do people say 'an MED report' but 'a UN report'?

We use **an** rather than **a** because of the pronunciation of the initial consonant. *M* in *MED* is pronounced /em/, which starts with a vowel sound.

4. Shall I use articles with names of illnesses?

We don't normally use articles with illnesses or diseases, for instance *cancer* NOT *a cancer*. However, temporary illnesses – mostly words with the suffix *-ache*, do tend to have articles, for example, *a headache*.