

On Articles: *When To Use "The"*

1. Use *the* when the reader is familiar with the same specific thing or person you are talking about.

Examples:

The sun is bright today.

Please open the door.

In your writing, you will almost always use *the* with the people involved in the procedure or disease:

the doctor

the nurse

the patient

the physician

the assistant

the person

the surgeon

the therapist

the child

*Note: you may alternatively use the plural form of these words, without *the*:

Patients with aphasia . . .

Children who suffer from autism . . .

2. Use *the* when you refer to something specific.

Examples:

Students in the 1970's did not have computers.

students in general; all students—we do not know which students.

The students at the Faculty of Medicine use the computers on the first floor.

specific students

3. Use *a* for the first time you mention something new.
Use *the* if you have already mentioned something earlier.

Example:

A gastroscope is a long, thin tube with a camera on the end. The gastroscope is inserted into the incision so that the doctor can view the internal organs.

4. Often, but not always, use *the* in the following construction:

the _____ of _____

Examples:

The symptoms of narcolepsy affect the pattern of sleep.

Treatment often involves the use of drugs.

A bone scan is performed to detect the spread of cancer.

In the first stage of the procedure, the patient is prepared.

5. Use *the* with body parts since they are specific objects.

Examples:

The dentist must now clean out the interior of the tooth.

The appendix is a 3-6 inch sac at the end of the large intestine.

During the process of breathing, the chest expands and air enters the lungs.

When *Not* To Use "The"

Most of the time, you will NOT use *the* when you are making a GENERALIZATION.

- A. **Generalizing about count nouns** (these are nouns you can count: 1 car, 2 cars, 3 cars, etc.):

Use *a* or *an* for a singular noun, or nothing with a plural noun, when you make a GENERALIZATION about a general category of people or things.

Examples:

A virus is a microscopic organism that causes disease in humans. OR
Viruses are microscopic organisms that cause disease in humans.
(BUT The virus that causes chicken pox is called the varicella-zoster virus.)

An antibiotic is used to treat this disease. OR
Antibiotics are used to treat this disease.
(BUT The antibiotic that is usually prescribed to Mariam is Cipromax.)

A test can be performed to diagnose the disease. OR
Tests can be performed to diagnose the disease.
(BUT The tests used to diagnose sleep disorders are painless.)

- B. **Generalizing about noncount nouns** (these are nouns you cannot count: bravery, furniture, sugar, etc.)

Do not use *the* or *a* when making a GENERALIZATION.

1. **ABSTRACTIONS** (*ideas you cannot see or touch, such as patience, advice, education*)

Do not use *the* or *a* with abstractions when you make a GENERALIZATION.

Examples:

He does not respond to offers of comfort.

Rest is vital for recovery.

If you are not making a generalization but you specifically define or describe the idea, then you should use *the*:

Examples:

He is feeling much better thanks to the comfort that his friends gave him.

The rest I got at home was much better than the rest I got at the hospital.

2. **NAMES OF DISEASES**

Do not use *the* or *a* with the names of diseases when making a GENERALIZATION.

Examples:

Pneumonia is very common worldwide.

The first symptoms of chicken pox occur 10-21 days after exposure to the virus.

3. **SYMPTOMS**

Often, you will not use *the* or *a* the first time you mention symptoms when making a GENERALIZATION.

Example:

Patients experience fever, sore throat and loss of appetite. The fever is usually high.