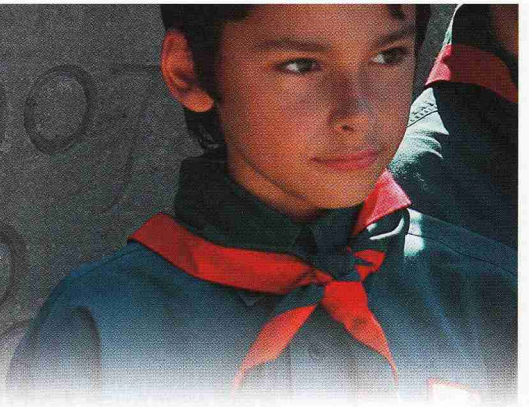


6 Articles

In 1907 an English soldier set up an organisation to educate boys, particularly in outdoor pursuits. The soldier was Robert Baden-Powell, who became Lord Baden-Powell, and the organisation was the beginning of the World Scout Movement.



1 Form

Articles (*a/an, the*) precede nouns and some other words (e.g. *few, little* and adjectives) in a noun phrase:

*Can I have **a few small paper clips**? I managed to get **the last gold charm bracelet** in the sale.*

The article is usually the first word in a noun phrase, but note

- *all/both/half + the:*

*Have you received **all the** information? You've only paid **half the** outstanding amount.*

- *quite/rather/such/what/half + a/an:*

*I've got **quite a** difficult problem to sort out in my maths course.*

2 Naming, describing and classifying

We use *a/an* when we name or describe something:

*That's **a** scarab beetle.*

*'What's that?' 'It's **an** enormous anthill.'*

*We've just seen **a** really interesting film.*

Although *a/an* is similar in meaning to *one*, it is not identical:

*There's **a** room available at the Marriott on Friday night.*

(= at least one room, and maybe more than one. The exact number isn't important.)

*There's **one** room available at the Marriott on Friday night.*

(= There is only one room available.)

We use *a/an* when we refer to one example of a group, e.g. a profession or a species:

*Judith's daughter is studying to become **a** solicitor.*

***An** African elephant has larger ears than **an** Indian elephant.*

We usually refer to the whole group with the plural, without the definite article

(► Unit 6.4):

✗ *The African elephants have larger ears than the Indian elephants.*

✓ *African elephants have larger ears than Indian elephants.*

FORMALITY CHECK In more formal contexts we use *the* with a singular noun to generalise about a whole group or species:

*The African elephant has larger ears than **the** Indian elephant.*

We only use *a/an* when we talk about one example in a group or species:

***An** elephant walked right past our hut yesterday evening. (= an individual elephant)*



We do NOT use *a/an* when we refer to the whole group, i.e. all members of the group:

✗ *Ruthless poachers hunt **an** elephant for the valuable ivory of its tusks.*

✓ *Ruthless poachers hunt **the** elephant for the valuable ivory of its tusks.*

✓ *Ruthless poachers hunt elephants for the valuable ivory of their tusks.*

We can also use *the* with an adjective to refer to a group of people (► Unit 12.5):

***The homeless** will be removed from the streets and placed in hostels.*

This is possible with nationality adjectives that end in *-ch, -sh, -ese* and *-s*, e.g. *the French, the Welsh, the Chinese, the Swiss*. For other nationalities, we have to use a plural noun:

***The French** are known for their cuisine, but in my opinion **Italians** know better how to combine good food with a healthy diet.*