THE DEFINITE/INDEFINITE ARTICLE WRITING PRACTICE

USING DEFINITE, NON-DEFINITE, INDEFINITE OR ZERO ARTICLES IN WRITING INTRODUCTORY EMAIL

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THE DEFINITE/INDEFINITE ARTICLE WRITING PRACTICE

by

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Getting Started

Busyteacher.org site explains the importance of writing in all ages whether in business context, internet communication, relating the fun task to children. This means we have many reasons to write. For beginners, who have started learning the English language or for students who want to have understanding on how to use it correctly in any writing correspondence such as an email in order to increase their chances to get a reply. However, to put a/an, the, or some can be confusing that sometimes this creates misunderstanding between the sender and the receiver of the message. Whatever reasons, English teacher has to teach articles at some point or another. Here are some explanations for you for keeping things straight when you need to use them or teach them in writing an introductory email. It focuses on identifying the appropriate use of definite, non-definite, indefinite or zero articles through editing and revising your own draft.

Define the skills you want to focus in teaching or learning.

This activity is intended to explain to teachers, who would like to teach articles, and students, who are in beginner to upper intermediate level in English on how to use definite, non-definite, indefinite articles correctly in writing an email. We cannot avoid the fact that students today communicate through email whether it is for an application for university, submission for an assignment or research, or application for a job. In this research, students or teachers are given a guide on how to formulate self-introduction correctly in English to give a good impression to their recipients.
Presentation and Exercises of Article Usage

The usage of articles in English language is somewhat very complicated, especially for those second language speakers, because there is no equivalents of a/an, or the in their first language. For Visayan speakers we use “ang” if we meant about specific things for countable and mass nouns, while English language needs definite and indefinite articles to help you identify the new (indefinite article) or given (definite) information. In this research, the researcher tries clear up article confusion.

Despite of that perplexing usage of articles, Dulay, Burt and Krashen gave us hope. They said that the best way to learn them is through practice and exposure of their usage (Celce and Freeman (2008). Because of this, we include here exercises focusing on identifying noun phrase and detecting errors in its preceding articles. I believe that through focus instruction, confusion in choosing correct article in a given sentence can be cleared up. (Master 1994; Celce & Freeman 2008). Here some simple steps on how to use definite/indefinite article in English easily.

- Read a text.
- Identify the noun phrase.
- Analyze the noun whether it is countable or non-countable; singular or plural; individuation or non-individuation.
- Ask questions to the nouns – if it is new and never introduced in the previous text or conversation (a/an), if it is unique and only one and the best (the), if it general fact and everybody knows about it (zero article).
READ AND IDENTIFY NOUN PHRASE

To know what kind of articles to use when writing, we should learn the meaning of the nouns because as always they carry different context. Choosing a wrong article can change the meaning of the sentence. (Yule G. 2000)

Is the noun COUNTABLE?

A countable noun is simply a noun that you can count. You can talk about one, two or more, many several and so on. For example, A bag of apple - bag (one, singular) and apples (many, plural). On the other hand, some non-count nouns or mass nouns are treated as substances like butter and sugar. For example, several butters or two sugars. This kind of thing talked about changes to non-countable to countable context. Because of these contextual boundaries, choosing an article would depend on the context of the sender. (Refer to individuation below)

Example:

Non-countable: A pack of sugar (non-countable context)

Two sugars (countable context)

It is contextually understandable what the speaker tries to mean is two packs or dice. Some nouns can be considered as countable or uncountable.

Uncountable: Chocolate is sweet.

Countable: He ate a chocolate. (One serving in a box of chocolates.)
Some *proper nouns* like trade names such Kleenex to a kleenex (a paper tissue), Xerox to a xerox (a photocopy), and Kodak to a kodak (a camera) could shift to common nouns. Example, The Mike that came yesterday called. (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 2008)

As according to Ann Raimes generally, proper nouns are not using any articles at all. Nevertheless, there are a lot of exceptions like proper nouns as the title of people, continents, parts of the globe, countries which has the last word is a collective nouns, states, cities, districts, region, buildings, museums, hotels. Schools, streets, parks, roadways, lakes, seas, oceans, gulf, rivers, deserts, languages (the French language), or historical periods and events.

**Is the noun SINGULAR OR PLURAL?**

Most plural countable nouns are form by adding –s or –es. When a countable nouns ends with y, change the –y to ies like A family to families. However, there are some nouns that has vowel sounds before y, just add –s. Some nouns even ends with s like diabetes and physics are normally used non-countable, which means they don’t have plural forms. More examples of non-countable nouns and stay singular are advice, education, furniture, homework, information, leisure, violence, jewelry, luggage, baggage and all abstract nouns.

**Is the noun classify as INDIVIDUAL?**

**INDIVIDUATION** is the process of classifying as a single unit. Finding out its individuation will help you in choosing the right article; that is, we use *a or an* for
individuation or $\varnothing$ for non-individuation. There are nouns that are treated as distinct entity. It means when you say *bag* you can see a distinction from the rest, and *bag* is not part of the whole. However, because of conceptual boundaries, we tend to use some non-count nouns as countable.

Individual unit and countable: *A coffee* (He tries to say he wants a cup of coffee.) This happens when the writer treated the entity as substance and not part of the whole. Other examples are beer, bread, coffee, gold, ice, oil, paper, soap, tea, water or wine. This is considered to be non-standard in formal writing. This is only acceptable during casual conversation or literary writing. (Appears on p. 4 ‘Is the noun countable?’)

With this idea of conceptual boundaries, even the abstract nouns such as advice, courage, death, fear, help hope, knowledge, progress, sincerity, suspicion, which are uncountable, are treated as a single entity of its kind by using indefinite article *a/an*.

(Non-individuation, abstract): *Life* is good.

(Individuation, countable): Have a *life* of your own

EXERCISE 1: Read the following passage from the excerpt from Russel Baker’s autography which adapted from Ann Raimes, *How English Works*. Cambridge University Press, 2012 p.57)

My mother was a magician at stretching a dollar. That December, with Christmas approaching, she was out to work and Doris was in the kitchen when I barged into her bedroom one afternoon in search of a safety pin. Since her bedroom opened onto a community hallway, she kept the door, and stepped in. Standing against the wall was a big, black bicycle with balloon tires. I recognized instantly. It was the same second-hand bike I’d been admiring in Baltimore shop window. I’d even asked about the price. It was the
same horrendous. Something like $15. Somehow my mother had scraped together enough for a down payment and meant to surprise me with the bicycle on Christmas morning.

EXERCISE 2: Underline all the uses of *a, an, and the* in the passage. List them in two columns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a or an + noun</th>
<th>the+noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a magician</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXERCISE 3: Examine all the words that are preceded by the and discuss specifically which kitchen, which door and so on, is meant in the context of this passage, that is, do you as the reader know which kitchen or which door he writer means? For each noun preceded by *the*, write down that information you and author share about this item.

THE MEANING OF ARTICLES: ASK IT TO THE NOUNS

According to Murcian and Freeman (2008) that each article carries different meanings and understanding them would you to determine when to use an article and which article to use. In fact, for Malicsi (2010) and Raimes A. (2012), articles are one of the type of noun markers called determiners. It has three types with different uses and meanings according to their functions.

**Indefinite article**

The common mistakes among Filipinos is using *a/an* in a plural form noun. The fact that indefinite articles are only use for single entity. Example: I need a good answer. (Any good (singular) answer). Indefinite articles (*a/an*) are always use in fractions and frequencies in the sense of per, each or every; after what and such in exclamations; before quantifiers few and little and necessary of lot of, great/ good deal of as quantifiers. (Murcia and Freeman, 2008)
Example: What a good idea!

Idea, are you new here?

Has the noun idea introduced earlier in the conversation? If Yes and it is new to the conversational context, the best option is indefinite article.

**Non-definite article**

Thus, indefinite articles has plural counterpart which is *some*. According to Malicsi (2010), are paired with singular noun which is identifiable to the hearer but speaker prefers not to name the noun. Some plural nouns has a quantifier some that can be distinguished from context in writing or intonation accompanies with the non-verbal actions in speaking. Murcia and Freeman added that indefinite pronouns are used as one variety of emphatic statement to a special attribute of the topic or to mean “a degree of”

Example:

**Quantifier:** Some of the people left early.

**Emphatic:** That was some party.

**Presentative:** Some guys came to the door.

Have you mentioned the noun people, (not mentioned), guys before? *Some* is plural indefinite article *a/an* and this should be used with the first introduction of a plural noun.
Definite articles

When we use “the” in the sentences, this means that both the reader and writer are certain about the identity of which noun they are referring to. Especially non-count nouns, they usually take definite articles.

Example: The man left immediately.

Therefore, definite articles is the process by which we refer to a thing(s) as distinct from other members of the same category or class of objects.

Example: The class of Mr. Reyes has no class.

There are instances that we tend to get confuse which articles to use. We have abbreviations, they can take or not.

Abbreviations take or not to take articles

Definite and indefinite appear with nouns in an idioms:

A cold

Some idiomatic phrases, articles are dropped.

In bed

Onstage.

Some proper nouns have definite articles. Categories don’t take any articles such as Continents, languages, meals, names (singular), professions, proper names of stores and games, titles before names and years.

Note: Definite Article the can be used both singular and plural.
I’ve never met any (noun) like this, have I? Is the (noun) unique? Is particular (noun) the best and no one else?

For example: I got the book and the cover was very interesting.

My sisters is the smartest among the class.

Most of the time the proper nouns are unique with their capital letters, but not all unique noun are proper nouns like moon. Even it has no capital letter as proper noun, but we all know that there is no other moon. Other examples are (title) the president, (continent) the equator, (country) the United Kingdom, (building) the Eiffel Tower, (Museum) the Metropolitan Museum, (Park) the new botanical garden, (language) the French Language and many more. (See, Is this countable? pp 4-5)

*Kingdom is a collective noun.

Zero Articles
   A. We use zero article when you describe an event.

   Example: The boy goes to school by bus.

   B. Some are unexplainable idiomatic expressions. Sometimes, they use to describe the kind of activity.

   C. Finally it is clearly given in a recipes.

   D. Proper names or brand names.

   øSanta Claus stays in øGreenland.

   E. Common nouns that denotes substances. (E.g. øOil and øwater don’t mix.)

   F. Abstract concepts treated as non-countable (treated as countable) (E.g. øMoney can’t buy happiness.)
Is everyone knows (nouns)?

If the person stating general fact, the noun does not take any article. Usually the noun appears in plural form.

Example: (Countable) Raindrops fall from the sky. Or (Non-countable) Rain falls from the sky (anytime).

Since noun, raindrops is a general statement, it appears here in plural form; no article is needed. However, if the person would like to talk about the rain or any weather he experienced today or any specific day, he needs to use *the* in the preceded noun *rain* to change the meaning.

Example: I like the rain today.

**Note:** Choose the correct article carefully because if not, it may lead to controversial interpretations. There’s no exact rule with this, but exposing yourself by using them in conversation and writing will help you to remember. We have just to accept that we make errors when it comes to choosing articles; however, those mistakes can be fewer and farther when you understand the steps in *Identification and Analysis Of The Noun Phrase.*
EXERCISE 3: Identify if the proper nouns if each requires article or not. Write “the” if needed and ø (zero) if not needed.

Dear 1. ___ Kevin Sprout,

My name is 2. ___ Jake, I am from 3. ___ Diversion Network. You may remember me, we met at a booth in the 4. ___ New Tech Sales Convention in 5. ___ Salt Lake City last week. I am writing in regards to a conversation we had about 6. ___ software applications that could solve some of the technical issues your company is facing.

EXERCISE 4. Check the following e-mail for correct use of countable and uncountable nouns by examining every noun phrase carefully. Underline each noun write if it countable or uncountable in this context and then if it is singular or plural. Then, examine the articles (a, an, the) they use.

Dear Lisa Morron,

My name is Kevin Sprout, I am the HR Manager of Chittos. I received your email from Karen Uptown, who suggested I email you about a conference on Sales Management that we will be holding in July.
EXERCISE 5: Complete the following sentences with the given noun. Use the a or an where appropriate.

1. advice   a. ___________ you gave me was very helpful.
            b. People like to give ___________ to others.

2. school   a. ___________ on the corner is an elementary school.
            b. She goes to ___________ by bus.

3. parents  a. ___________ often argue with their teenage children.
            b. ___________ of the students at my school donated a lot of money to the scholarship program.

4. health   a. The most important thing in life is ___________.
            b. ___________ of aging people in is a matter of national concern.

5. wine     a. ___________ on the table is sweet.
            b. ___________ improves with age.

APPLICATION: CHOOSE THE RIGHT DEFINITE/INDEFINITE/NON-DEFINITE/ZERO ARTICLE IN WRITING AN INTRODUCTORY EMAIL

Prewriting and first draft: Knowing how to introduce yourself to someone in an email helps you to advance in your career and expand your networking. If you write with clear introduction of yourself, this will make your email readable to recipients. You will avoid some common mistakes especially in the usage of articles to set you apart from others.
In this stage called prewriting includes the different techniques includes, prewriting, listing, brainstorming, in putting your thoughts into writing. First, you need to make sure you know why you are contacting the recipient of your email. Your purpose stays in professional or business-related reasons, so he will not find you stalking. There might be a lot of ideas coming from your purpose on your first introductory email, but make sure you focus on only one important topic or purpose.

**Brainstorming.** After writing the draft, have someone or yourself check the basic elements of your paragraph especially its over-all structures. Take note on the proper usage of articles. Ask for their suggestions if the degree to which sentences are logically linked to each other.

**Organizing.** In writing an email of course, things include that you need to know is how to write an email and the introduction about yourself. Have the teacher check the content if it has unifying idea. In organizing an introductory email, follow the following guidelines:

1. **Make your subject line clear.** Make sure that you write a short subject line first, so you will not forgetting it. It is acceptable according to WIKIHOW to write “Introduction – Your name” example, Introduction – Maricel C. Urkom.

2. **Open with business salutation.** Start off with the tried business greetings for your intro-sentence:
   - Dear… (for example “Dear John”- continue on the next line)
   - To whom it may concern. (This is reserved for cases where you are sending an email but do not know whom to address.)
- Dear Ms. /Mr. /Mrs – if you are not sure about the real marital status, the default is Ms.

3. **Introduce yourself.** The first sentence should explain who you are. Include your title if applicable, but if you have multiple titles, just write the most important one.

   My name is øMaricel Urkom. I am from the English Department.

   My name is Karen, from grade 8 class.

4. **Explain how you got the email address, if applicable.** This shows that you went through the proper channel to reach them.

   - “Your office manager directed me towards this email address”
   - “I found this email address on your website:
   - “… So-and-so said that I should get in contact with you”

5. **Talk about the last time you met and how you know the person (if applicable).**

   Jogging the person’s memory can lead more engagement.

   “We talked briefly at the conference last week”

   “We spoke on the phone yesterday”

   “I saw your presentation on …”

   “We met each other in an acquaintance party. “

6. **Share common interest.** A little research on the recipient would help you to connect and keep this mutual interest business-related such as something in your field or professional passion you both share.

7. **Give your reason for getting in touch.** Explain clearly what you want and why you are contacting the person about it. Make sure it is manageable.
“I’m interested in learning more about…”
“İ’d like to meet with you sometime to discuss…”
“I would like your opinion on…”

8. Keep your email focused on one subject. Keep your introductory email short and simple and only ask one thing.

9. Thank the recipients for their time. This simple courtesy will greatly improve your chances of you to get a response.
   “I appreciate you taking the time to read this email.”
   “Thank you for taking time out of your”

10. Provide call to action. Ask the recipient to contact you when he has time.
   “Give me a call when you have some free time”
   “Let’s meet for lunch sometime soon”
   “What are your thoughts on…?”
   “I look forward to your response.”

11. End the email with simple ending salutation. Make sure the ending is concise and grateful. Avoid “Yours Truly, “Sincerely Yours”, “Cheers!” “Peace” Thank you for your consideration.
   “Sincerely,”
   “Thank you,”
   “Kind/Warm Regards,”

12. End with your name, title, and contact information. Keep it simple way to get back in touch and don’t overload with multiple sites.

   Maricel C. Urkom
   0917-700-9261
   maricelurkom@gmail.com
Writing first draft. When the above has completed, begin drafting the whole email for the specific purpose of introducing yourself to the recipient. Read and reread your email. Order the ideas according to the purpose and delete inappropriate ideas or unnecessary topic. Keep your email focus on one subject, simple and short sentences. It would be more effective when you provide limits for the ideas in the paragraph.

Revising. Have your teacher or your peer to model you the language, structure especially for the usage of articles, and the email format he or she would like you to see in your email. If possible, ask questions especially about the content (perspective) that will help you know what to revise on your email.

Editing. The mechanics includes the grammar, spelling and punctuation that you need to look into when editing. For example, you can underline all the use of a, an, the on the email message you wrote. Examine your noun phrase you have written. Determine whether you have used a determiner in front of it or a, an, the, or zero article. Circle the errors, or use an omission mark (˄) omitted article, write what you think the correct form should be. If you have problems deciding on a/an, the, or no article at all, Ann Raimes suggested us to look at each troublesome noun phrase and ask the following questions. This is the easiest way to edit your articles in your email. See next page 17 figure number 1.
Figure 1. Editing Advice suggested by Ann Raimes, Troublespots. New York: Cambridge University Press p. 105
Maybe five editing points can be included on your editing list. Remember these criteria for choosing errors when editing your own paper.

**Publishing.** Computers provides many new ways in making written pieces available for others to read. After editing your email or blog, you can send it to others or to your chosen recipients. But before sending or publishing it, make sure you have a clear purpose or message in your writing that needs to be send privately or publish publicly; who you like to read your writing to and where and how long you do want to work to be displayed publicly.

**CONCLUSION**

There are four kinds of article such as *definite* *(the)*, *non-definite* *(some)*, *indefinite* *(a/an)*, *zero* *(ø)* articles. These have different uses depending on their noun phrase or contextual meaning that the speaker has in mind. Though there are times, they are confusing and it is difficult to choose from them because there is no exact rule on remembering them, but theorist and grammarians suggested the easiest way to learn them is through exposure. One way to expose you to them is through writing. As a matter of fact, analyzing articles in reading and using them in a spoken conversation will keep your things straight when you face the question of definite or indefinite or zero or non-definite.

Since, we are in 21st century, computers have become a huge part in sending communications, and you can use these definite/indefinite/non-definite or zero articles in a self- introductory email as their means of practice. Enumerated below.

- Follow certain steps on how to write an email.
• Go through a writing process which, you will edit and revise their own writing using Ann Raimes editing advice.

• Organize your thoughts and adopt certain writing styles in writing appropriate to your introductory email.

• Formulate correct noun phrases choosing the appropriate articles to make your sentences meaningful and sensible to your recipients to increase your chance to receive a reply.

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