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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## 6 Minute Grammar

### Articles



*NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript*

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**Rob**

Hello again. Welcome to 6 Minute Grammar with me, Rob.

**Emma**

And me, Emma. Hello.

**Rob**

In today's programme, we're talking about three little words: **a**, **an** and **the**.

**Emma**

Also known as **articles**. So let's start by saying hello to Finn.

**Finn**

Hello.

**Emma**

And Finn, you're going to tell us about your time in Phnom Penh, which is the capital city of Cambodia. Listen out for the words **a**, **an** and **the**.

**Finn**

Yes, I was living in **a** flat near the city centre. I was lucky because every morning I saw **an** elephant walk past my front door. **The** elephant was giving rides to tourists. **The** owner told me that her name was Sambo. I discovered later that she was **the** only elephant in Phnom Penh. Here's **a** photo.

**Rob/Emma**

Ahhh...

**Emma**

And quite a few articles there. We had **a** flat and **a** photo ...

**Rob**

Yes, we use **a** before singular nouns. **A** flat and **a** photo ...

**Emma**

...but in spoken English it's 'uh' not 'a'.

**Finn**

I was living in **a flat**. Here's **a photo**.

**Emma**

... Now, Finn also said he saw **an** elephant. Not **a** elephant. **An** elephant.

**Rob**

That's because 'elephant' begins with 'e'. We use **an**, not **a**, before nouns that begin with 'a', 'e', 'i', 'o' - and most words starting with 'u'. We say **an apple, an elephant, an ice-cream, an orange, an uncle**.

**Emma**

But in spoken English, **an** sounds like 'un'. Finn.

**Finn**

**An apple, an elephant, an ice-cream, an orange, an uncle.**

**Rob**

Now let's look at **the** ['thuh'] and **the** ['thee']. Finn said:

**Finn**

**The elephant** was giving rides to tourists ...

**Emma**

Yes, and it's **the elephant** because it's the second time he mentions the elephant:

**Rob**

A first time, and **the** ['thuh'] or **the** ['thee'] second time. And it's **the** ['thee'] not **the** ['thuh'] with elephant because elephant starts with 'e'. Finn.

**Finn**

I saw **an elephant**. **The elephant** was giving rides to tourists.

**Emma**

Ok, and there was another one – **The owner**. Finn only mentioned the owner once, so why **the** and not **an**?

**Rob**

Good question, and the answer is: we use **the** before a person or thing when it's clear exactly which person or thing we're talking about, even if it's the first time. Let's hear it again:

**Finn**

**The owner** told me that her name was Sambo.

**Emma**

So Finn's talking about the owner of Sambo, not the owner of any unknown elephant.

**Rob**

OK, so that's **a**, **an** and **the**. Now let's hear more about elephants. Can you spot the articles in this sentence?

**Finn**

African elephants are bigger than Indian elephants.

**Rob**

Actually there were no articles. Trick question, sorry! There's no article before African elephants and Indian elephants because we're talking about African elephants and Indian elephants in general...

**Emma**

...not a specific African or Indian elephant.

**Rob**

So in Finn's story, he didn't use an article when he talked about tourists in general.

**Finn**

**The elephant** was giving rides to **tourists**.

**IDENT**

You're listening to BBC Learning English.

**Emma**

And we're talking about articles.

**Rob**

And now here are some top tips for using **the**.

**Emma**

Tip one. Don't use **the** before the names of **most countries, cities** and **continents**.

**Rob**

Just say: **Saudi Arabia, Warsaw** and **Europe**.

**Emma**

Tip two: say **the** with **countries with plural names** or the words **Republic** or **Kingdom** in the name...

**Rob**

**The Maldives; The United Arab Emirates.**

**Emma**

Tip three: use **the** for the names of **rivers, seas, oceans** and **mountain ranges**...

**Rob**

**The Mississippi; The Red Sea; The Andes.**

**Emma**

Tip four: Don't use **the** before names of **single mountains** and **lakes**...

**Rob**

**Mount Kilimanjaro; Lake Titicaca.**

**Emma**

And now it's quiz time. I'm going to say a sentence with or without an article and you have to say if it's correct or wrong. Ready? Number 1: I've got cat.

**Rob**

That's wrong. It should be: **I've got a cat**. Because you need an article before a singular noun when you mention it the first time. Or you can say **I've got the cat** if it's clear which cat we're talking about.

**Emma**

Number 2. I'm going on holiday to United States next week. I'm so excited!

**Rob**

Wrong again. It should be: I'm going to **the United States** next week because it's a plural country name.

**Emma**

And number 3. I love elephants!

**Rob**

And that's correct because you're talking about elephants in general, so: no article needed.

**Emma**

Well done if you got those right.

**Rob**

There's lots more information about articles on our website at [www.bbclearningenglish.com](http://www.bbclearningenglish.com). Join us again for more 6 Minute Grammar.

**Rob / Emma**

Bye.