

# ENGLISH SYNTAX

FOR

FOREIGN STUDENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

THIS classification of points of English syntax requiring particular attention by foreign students is based on my " Notes on English Syntax " published in 1936.

Further observation of mistakes made by other races confirms that the selected headings deal with English usages which are not sufficiently stressed in grammars written for English students.

This book is intended to supplement a grammar and is therefore not complete. Experience has shown that special lessons on syntax effect immediate improvement in conversation and reduce the amount of time wasted on common errors in essays.

I have found that to refer the student to the paragraph dealing with his mistake by a number in the margin of his exercise book is more effective than writing the correct form for him in the script. Thus an error of concord in the Third Person Singular, Simple Present Indicative is signalled by " 32 " in the margin to enable the student to insert the terminal " s " himself.

A key to the exercises is published for the use of registered teachers.

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# English Syntax for Foreign Students

## CHAPTER I

### ARTICLES

#### I. INTRODUCTION

We shall start with those short but very important words known in English as the articles. The Indefinite Article is “*a*” or “*an*” and the Definite Article is “*the*”.

Consider this passage and read it aloud twice :—

“You will see on page 11 a picture of a shop where this reading book can be bought. The shop is part of a large building. The picture does not show the whole of the building.”

Notice that the first reference to “picture” and “shop” is indefinite, so we say “*a* picture of *a* shop,” but the end of the sentence tells us that it is a shop “where this reading book can be bought.” This is now a particular shop, a definite shop, so the next sentence begins “The shop,” and tells us that it is part of a large building. Both the picture and the building have now ceased to be indefinite ideas to us, so the third sentence refers to *the* picture and *the* building. Read the sentence once more.

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Here is another example from the beginning of a story :—

“Once there was a great big jungle ; and in the jungle there was a great big lion ; and the lion was king of the jungle.”

To begin with, the jungle is indefinite, so we say “*a* jungle.” The next time it is mentioned it has become definite in our minds, so we say “in *the* jungle.” In the same way *a* lion becomes *the* lion when he becomes defined, or definite. Notice, too, that we do not say “the lion was *a* king of the jungle,” or “*the* king of the jungle.” In the case of titles which can be held only by one person at a time, no article, either definite or indefinite, is used. We know that there is only one king of the jungle at one time, so it is not necessary to use “*a*” or “*the*.” We say, simply, “He was king of the jungle.”

Here are two more examples illustrating this last point :—

George VI is King of England (NOT “*a* king,” OR “*the* king”).  
Sir Franklin Gimson became Governor of Singapore in 1946.

### 2. THE INDEFINITE ARTICLE

In many languages the words for “*a* book” are the same as those for “*one* book.” This is not so in English.

Consider these sentences :—

- (*a*) There is one man in our office who can speak Dutch.
- (*b*) There is a man in our office who can speak Dutch.

From (*a*) we know that none of the other men in the office can speak Dutch. No more and no less than one man can speak Dutch. It is not indefinite, it is exact.

From (b) we do not know whether any of the other men can speak Dutch or not.

Here is another pair of sentences :—

(c) I am going to ask you one question (only one, not two or more).

(d) I am going to ask you a question. (Indefinite.)

Consider this sentence :—

There will not be one stone left upon another.

Notice that this is much more emphatic than saying :—

There will not be a stone left upon another.

As the word “one” has an exact meaning, it is obviously wrong to say “We waited about one hour,” or “My house is about one mile from the town.” What should we say ?

### *Exercise*

What is wrong with these sentences ?

There were one thousand men at the football match.

The repairs to the car cost him over one hundred dollars.

There is one live snake under the table.

London is a largest city.

### 3. DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE

Consider these two sentences :—

A man in our office who can speak Dutch told me about the plan.

The man in our office who can speak Dutch told me about the plan.

Here is another pair, referring to a twin :—

Owing to the slight difference between them, strangers cannot tell one boy from another. Owing to a slight difference, however, their teacher never confuses them.

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From pairs like these the ideas of definite and indefinite can be distinguished, and the use of the Definite and Indefinite Articles becomes clearer. Make six similar pairs of sentences as an exercise.

#### *Exercise (1-3)*

Correct the following sentences (1-3) :—

A old man had a English book.

Few days ago I went to friend's house.

She wishes to write letter.

I have no money to buy bicycle.

Government will spend large amount of money.

In slump many are out of job.

On Saturdays I read book or go to cinema.

It is very difficult matter to go for pilgrimage.

The organisation of nursing system was great triumph.

#### 4. THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

Now let us state some rules.

##### **Rule 1 for Concrete Common Nouns, Singular and Plural**

In the singular the Definite Article "**the**" must NOT be omitted.

In the plural "**the**" is NOT required unless the Concrete Common Noun is defined by a restrictive word, phrase, or clause. (Restrictive means limiting, narrowing, reducing the width of the general idea.) Examples :—

Indefinite (a) A salesman serves customers.

Definite (b) The salesman serves customers.

Plural (c) Salesmen serve customers.

Defined Plural (d) The salesmen in this shop serve their customers well.

The Definite Article is required in (d) because the wide meaning of the Plural Concrete Noun



“salesmen” is defined by the restrictive phrase “in this shop.”

Consider this sentence :—

The packers on the second storey prepare cases of books to be sent to places far and near.

The packers are definite ; they are the ones on the second storey, so we say “*the* packers.” “Cases” are not definite. Any, or many, cases are meant, so no “*the*” is required. Are the places definite ? No, they are far and near, so an article would be wrong.

Here are two pairs of sentences. Explain the use or omission of the articles :—

- (a) Cars are faster than trains.
- (b) The cars near the train were damaged by bombs.
- (c) Books are useful.
- (d) The new books in the library are interesting.

Work this out yourself. Why would an article be wrong in this sentence :—

Accidents may be caused in many ways.

*Exceptions.*—There are two exceptions to Rule 1. The words man and woman used indefinitely do not require an article. Examples :—

Man is a thinking animal.

Woman suffers any hardship for the family.

Before going on to Rule 2, let us be sure we know what an Abstract Noun is. An Abstract Noun is the name of a quality which exists only in the mind. We see, for instance, a healthy man. His health is an idea which exists in the minds of those thinking of it. Health is an Abstract Noun. Other examples are happiness, wisdom, courage, perseverance, etc. (see paragraph 10).

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### Rule 2 for Abstract Nouns and Material Nouns (names of matter)

Abstract Nouns and Material Nouns are used only in the singular. They take NO article unless defined by a restrictive word, phrase, or clause. Examples :—

#### 1. ABSTRACT NOUNS WITHOUT ARTICLES

- (a) There is less *danger* from fire in our country than there is in England.
- (b) It is very easy for us to obtain *heat* for cooking.
- (c) *Life* is short.
- (d) People have no desire for *war*.

#### 2. ABSTRACT NOUNS WITH ARTICLES BECAUSE DEFINED

- (a) *The danger* from fires lighted by careless campers is very great.
- (b) Anything dry can be set on fire by *the heat* of the rays of the sun.
- (c) *The life* of a teacher is varied.
- (d) *The war* ended in 1945. (We know what war is meant.)

#### 3. MATERIAL NOUNS WITHOUT ARTICLES

- (a) Later, *paper* was invented.
- (b) When *flint* is struck with a piece of steel, sparks fly off.
- (c) The engine is pumping *water* into the burning building.
- (d) *Margarine* is not widely used in South Africa.
- (e) *Tin* is mined in Malaya.
- (f) *Rubber* is obtained from many countries.

#### 4. MATERIAL NOUNS WITH ARTICLES BECAUSE DEFINED

- (a) The Chinese made *the first paper* in the world.
- (b) *The flint* found here is not suitable for lighters.
- (c) *The water* pumped into the building ruined the furniture.
- (d) *The margarine* manufactured nowadays is much improved.
- (e) *The tin* from this mine is sold locally.
- (f) *The rubber* in the smokehouse caught fire.

The rule that no article is required unless the Abstract or Material Noun is defined by a *restrictive* word, phrase, or clause is NOT affected when the noun is preceded by an adjective. Examples :—

Avoid unripe fruit (in general). BUT  
The unripe fruit he ate made him ill.  
The scout showed good sense. BUT  
The good sense he showed was praised.

These classes of nouns include the names of seasons, technical names of diseases, sciences, arts, occupations, meals, games, languages, colours, and natural phenomena. Here is a series of sentences illustrating their uses with and without articles :—

#### SEASONS.

We play football in winter.  
The winter of 1947 was very severe.

#### DISEASES.

He fell ill with fever, with influenza, with typhoid, with malaria.  
The malaria he contracted in the tropics ruined his health.

*Note.*—Common names of diseases need articles.

#### Examples :—

She was suffering from a cough, the stomachache, a headache, the toothache, a cold.  
“She was suffering from cold” means that she was affected by exposure to a low temperature, not by the common disease.

#### SCIENCES AND ARTS.

We studied chemistry, physics, painting, sculpture at school.  
We have forgotten the chemistry, physics, etc., we learned at school.

#### OCCUPATIONS.

His parents were interested in engineering, banking, plumbing.  
The engineering in this district is of a high standard.

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### MEALS.

We had breakfast, lunch, tea, dinner. (NEVER, please, "We took rice.")

The dinner to which we invited him was a great success.

### GAMES.

Students play cricket, badminton, basketball, billiards, bridge.  
The football played on the rough ground was naturally poor.

### LANGUAGES.

She speaks French as well as English.

The English spoken in Devon is difficult to understand.

### COLOURS.

Our school colours are yellow and black.

The yellow in the pattern has faded.

### NATURAL PHENOMENA.

In the tropics we have hot weather and heavy storms.

The hot weather in June was very trying.

Before going on to Collective Nouns we must note many current expressions in which the article is omitted to convey a particular shade of meaning. Note the difference between these pairs of sentences. The odd numbered sentences are without articles, the even numbered sentences have the same noun with an article.

1. I went to bed (to rest).
2. I went to the bed (to fetch something).
3. She goes to school (as a pupil).
4. She goes to the school once a month (as a visitor).
5. He went to sea (as a sailor).
6. He went to the sea (for a holiday).
7. The bombers came by day or by night.
8. The carpenter is paid by the day.
9. Transport by water is cheap.
10. The horses were standing in the water.
11. The books were sent by rail.

12. The workman lifted the rail.
13. It is difficult to reach the coast by land in some places.
14. He works on the land (an agricultural labourer).
15. We travelled by air to Australia.
16. The air in the country is pure.
17. The child was in bed.
18. The jewels were hidden in the bed.
19. The thief was in gaol (as a resident).
20. The priest was in the gaol (as a visitor, we hope).
21. They were in church (attending a service).
22. They were in the church (sheltering from the rain, perhaps).
23. The refugees set sail in a junk.
24. The skipper set the sail at a dangerous angle.
25. They dropped anchor at sunset.
26. They lost the anchor in a storm.
27. We left school in 1941.
28. We left the school at 8 P.M. (after the concert).
29. The driver changes gear silently.
30. The mechanic changed the gear as it was badly worn.
31. We journeyed east, or west, or north, or south.
32. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west.
33. In the north of Europe it is cold ; it is warmer in the south.

### *Exercise (4)*

Correct the following sentences :—

- I want to buy new book of same kind from bookshop.
- A man differs from the animals.
- They believe that the ghosts live there.
- Helmets are used by the soldiers.
- Peasants were dying by the hundreds.
- I clean it with a sandpaper.
- Then I must have a gum and the patches.
- A walk is a good exercise and good for body.
- He has to adhere to the rigid discipline.
- Boys pay a great attention to newspapers.
- He took a care of his horse.

She was trying to find a shelter.

They like to make a fun of it.

He is suffering from the tuberculosis.

Yesterday I had headache and cough.

When the supper is over we go to bed.

When we came to take the dinner we found the spoons  
had gone.

We are going to play the basketball this afternoon

The horse-racing is popular in Australia.

In the recent times the tobacco was heavily taxed.

We had expectation of large profit.

## 5. COLLECTIVE NOUNS

Collective Nouns include names of groups, definite or indefinite, adjectives used as nouns, nations, religious sects, and the word "blood" in the sense of a mass.

*Rule.*—ALL Collective Nouns require the article EXCEPT the six words congress, mankind, nature, posterity, society, parliament, and "blood" as the name of a substance, when it can be considered a Material Noun.

Examples of the EXCEPTIONS :—

Research is beneficial to mankind, to society, to posterity

The law will be considered by Congress and by Parliament.

Nature is wonderful.

Examples of Collective Nouns with articles :—

The crowd was watching the fight.

The week consists of seven days.

The public supported the idea.

The poor are to be pitied.

Observe the good and the true.

The Japanese were defeated.

The Muslims built a new mosque.  
The elements have been studied by scientists.  
He had eighty dollars in the bank.  
The circulation of the blood must be studied. But  
Blood is a red fluid. ("Blood" is not a collective here,  
but a material noun.)  
The bridge was built by the Government.

*Note.*—In the colonies many speakers, including Europeans, omit the article when referring to the local government, and use such phrases as "The responsibility of Government," "Provided by Government," etc. In my opinion this is purely a local usage, grammatically unsound. Another local expression is "He has gone to office," when in England one would say "to the office."

### *Exercise (1-5)*

Correct the following sentences :—

Of certainty, State should provide for unemployed.  
Flood is a calamity and big commotion is made.  
After a flood, new layer of soil is deposited.  
Enormous number of tourists visit Switzerland.  
The servant asks new bulb.  
There is beautiful picture on the wall.  
I joined my friends to picnic.  
We sat in shade.  
This object is protective covering for the head and is known as helmet.  
A bell gives musical sound and can be used for giving signal.

## 6. PROPER NOUNS

*Rule.*—Singular Proper Nouns take no article except when defined. Examples :—

Confucius shows us a way of life.  
The influence of the great Confucius cannot be estimated.

Nelson died at Trafalgar.

This officer was described as the Nelson of his country.

Sunday is a day of rest.

The Sunday after next will be Easter Sunday.

August is a pleasant month in Europe.

We shall never forget the August of 1945.

Christmas is a cheerful festival.

A Christmas spent away from home is seldom gay.

*Constant exceptions* include the names of rivers, seas, oceans, ships, newspapers, magazines, poems, and public buildings having no names of persons or places. *These must have an article.* Examples :—

Hankow is on the Yang-tze.

Boston is on the Atlantic.

Malta is in the Mediterranean.

The *Mauretania* made a record voyage.

I read it in *The Times*.

The *Field* is a popular magazine.

We studied the "Iliad" last year.

He went to the Capitol, the Odeon, the New World.

We were invited to the Residency, the Mansion House.

He was educated at the Anglo-Chinese School, the English College, the Royal Military Academy.

Examples of public buildings with names of persons or places and therefore requiring NO article :—

St Andrew's (Cathedral or School).

St Joseph's (Institution).

Raffles (College or Institution).

King's (College or School).

Christ Church.

His Majesty's (Theatre).

Daly's, Wyndham's (Theatres).

Charing Cross (Station or Hospital).

Fraser's Hill.

Buckingham Palace.

King's House.

Clifford Pier.

St George's (Church).

Euston (Station).

Victoria (Station).

Clifford School.

Guy's (Hospital).

Westminster (School or Hospital).

Government House.



Plural Proper Nouns can be compared to collectives, and take the article, whether Simple or Compound. Examples :—

The Tudors.      The Rockies.      The Himalayas.

Titles preceded by an adjective and foreign titles require an article. Examples :—

The Sultan.      The Generalissimo.

### *Exercise (6)*

Correct the following sentences :—

They went to the Torquillstone Castle.

We visited the St Paul's Hill.

The St George's Church was damaged by bombs.

I walked along the Middle Road.

He went to Zoological Gardens.

She saw the film at Pavilion Cinema.

He studied at University of London.

I read it in *Spectator*.

The Raffles College is a fine building.

I hope to travel in Union of South Africa.

## 7. ARTICLES (Synopsis)

### *Common Nouns*

Concrete Singular Common Nouns take “**the**” EXCEPT “man” and “woman” used indefinitely, and current idioms such as “at home,” “by rail,” etc.

Plural Common Nouns take no article UNLESS defined by a restrictive word, phrase, or clause.

Abstract Nouns and names of matter used generally take no article UNLESS defined by a restrictive word, phrase, or clause.