

A Remedial English Grammar for  
Foreign Students

by

Frederick T. Wood

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## PREFACE

This book does not set out to be a complete grammar of the English language. Its aim, as the title implies, is to concentrate on, and to attempt to correct, the most frequent grammatical mistakes made by foreign students of English. To some extent, of course, the difficulties experienced, and the mistakes most frequently made, vary according to the nationality and the mother tongue of the students concerned, but there are quite a large number which are common to almost all, and it is with these that the present book deals. They have been suggested by those experienced in the teaching of English as a foreign language, and by foreign students themselves with whom the writer has been in touch either personally or by correspondence. Thanks are also due to Mr Ronald Ridout, who read the entire typescript and made a number of useful suggestions.

A feature of the book is the provision of ample exercises to give the student practice on each point as it arises. The explanatory matter has been made as concise and simple as possible, and illustrative examples have been given of each point dealt with.

The tendency of modern linguistic teaching is to avoid as far as possible the type of exercise which involves substitution or the mere filling in of blank spaces within the framework of a given sentence; and in general the present writer is in full sympathy with this tendency. The inclusion in the present book of so many exercises of this kind can, however, be justified by the purpose they are intended to serve and the aim of the book as a whole—the correction of specific mistakes and the removal of particular difficulties. If the student is given a free hand he is likely to avoid the difficulties; if he is to master them by constant practice he must be kept to the point all the time. It is to help him in this way that the exercises have been devised. If he wishes, of course, the teacher can supplement them by others of his own to meet the needs of a particular group.

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## I. The articles

### A. THE DEFINITE ARTICLE (*THE*)

1 Do not put *the* before the names of substances if they are used in a general sense.

Gold is a precious metal. (not *the gold*)

Bread is made from flour. (not *the bread* . . . *the flour*)

Lead is very heavy. (not *the lead*)

But *the* must be used if the reference is to a particular kind or specimen of the substance.

The gold mined here is of poor quality.

They were grateful for the bread we gave them.

Thieves stole the lead from the roof.

(Similarly: sand, butter, cheese, milk, grass, meat, paper, rice)

The nature of the particular kind or specimen need not always be stated; it may sometimes be understood from the situation, or from what has been said previously.

If you will pay for the bread, I will pay for the meat.

(i.e., the bread and the meat that we need, or that we have recently had)

2 Do not put *the* before the names of meals if they refer to the meals generally, as a part of the daily routine.

Breakfast is at eight o'clock. (not *the breakfast*)

When do you have dinner? (not *the dinner*)

Have you had lunch yet? (not *the lunch*)

But *the* must be used:

(a) When the meal is a particular one, thought of as a social function.

The dinner will be held at the Grand Hotel.



(b) When the name of the meal refers to the food rather than the occasion.

We enjoyed the breakfast she gave us.  
The dinner was not properly cooked.

*N.B.* The name of a meal may be preceded by a possessive adjective (my, your, his, her, their, its) if we wish to give it a personal application.

I was having my lunch when they arrived.  
She always has her breakfast in bed.  
It's time I gave this dog its dinner.

3 Do not put *the* before plural nouns when they are used in a general or a universal sense.

Apples are grown in many different countries. (not *the apples*)  
Books are essential to a student. (not *the books*)  
Aeroplanes can fly very fast. (not *the aeroplanes*)

But if the reference is to particular ones, then *the* must be used.

The apples on our tree are not yet ripe.  
The books you gave me will be most useful.

*The* is also used when the reference is to all of the things mentioned, but only within a particular country or area. The country or area need not be stated; it may be implied in the context.

The recent frosts have damaged the cherries.

4 Do not put *the* before the names of games.

I play football. (not *the football*)  
Chess is a game which requires great skill and patience.  
(not *the chess*)  
(Similarly: cricket, rugby, tennis, hockey, polo, baseball, cards, whist, draughts, dominoes, ludo)

5 Do not use *the* before the names of countries unless the name suggests that the country is made up of smaller units or constituent parts.

France, Italy, China and Ghana are all republics. (not *the France, the Italy, the China, the Ghana*)

But: The United States is one of the great world powers.

(Similarly the following must have the article:

the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, the U.S.S.R., the U.S.A., the Netherlands.)

We also say *the Sudan* and *the Transvaal*, although the names do not suggest that they are composed of smaller units.

An article is also necessary if the name of the country is preceded by the word *Kingdom, Republic, Protectorate, Federation.*

The Kingdom of Macedon, The Republic of South Africa.

6 Do not use *the* before the words *King* and *Queen* if they are followed by the name of the king or queen.

King George V, Queen Victoria, Queen Elizabeth II  
(not *the King George V, the Queen Victoria, the Queen Elizabeth II*)

The same applies to *Pope*.

Pope John (not *the Pope John*)

King George V and Queen Elizabeth II are read as *King George the Fifth* and *Queen Elizabeth the Second*.

Similarly: Richard III (Richard the Third), Henry IV (Henry the Fourth), Edward VII (Edward the Seventh)

7 *The* may be used before a name which ends in *Road* where the name is also a place-name, but it may also be omitted.

I bought this watch at a shop in the Edgware Road.  
or I bought this watch at a shop in Edgware Road.

But it must not be used before names ending in *Street, Avenue, Crescent* or *Lane*: nor is it used before the name of a square, or a road where the name is not a place-name.

There are many large shops in Oxford Street. (not *the Oxford Street*)

Nelson's monument is in Trafalgar Square. (not *the Trafalgar Square*)

To avoid confusion, the student is advised to omit *the* before *Road* also. But it must not be omitted when *road*—in this case spelt with a small letter—is not part of the name, but means ‘the road that leads to . . . whatever place is named’.

When you get to the outskirts of Dover, take the London road.

**8** Put *the* before nouns which name the inhabitants of a country collectively or as a community, but not before the names of their languages.

The French live in France, and the Portuguese in Portugal. (not *French live in France, and Portuguese in Portugal.*)

The Russians sent up the first earth satellite. (not *Russians sent up . . .*)

(Similarly: the British, the English, the Chinese, the Germans, the Dutch, the Italians, the Indians)

The inhabitants of France speak French. (not *the French*)  
Spanish is spoken in Spain. (not *the Spanish*)

(Similarly: English, German, Russian, Italian, Chinese, Hindustani, Urdu, Serbo-Croat, Polish)

Plural nouns standing for the people of a particular country, however, are not preceded by *the* if the people in question are thought of individually.

Indians have dark skins.

Russians drink vodka.

In some cases one noun is used for the collective sense, and a different one for the individual sense.

*the English*, but *Englishmen*; *the French*, but *Frenchmen*;  
*the British*, but *Britons*; *the Spanish*, but *Spaniards*; *the Irish*, but *Irishmen*.

**9** Put *the* before the names of mountain ranges, or ranges of hills, but not before the names of single mountains or hills. (For exceptions to this rule, see below.)

The Alps, the Himalayas, the Pyrenees, the Pennines, the Cotswolds

But: Everest, Mont Blanc, Snowdon (not *the Everest*,  
*the Snowdon*)

As exceptions to this rule we always say: *the Matterhorn*, *the Jungfrau*.

**10** Use *the* before the names of rivers, canals, seas, oceans, valleys, deserts and forests.

London is on the Thames. (not *on Thames*)

Many ships use the Kiel Canal. (not *use Kiel Canal*)

(Similarly: the North Sea, the Pacific, the Baltic, the Ganges, the Rhine, the Sahara, the Ardennes, the Black Forest)

But when the name of a river forms part of the name of a town that stands on it, *the* is not used.

Stratford-upon-Avon, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Kingston-on-Thames, Burton-on-Trent

**11** Use *the* before the names of municipal or government departments and before the names of shops, business houses, industrial concerns, banks etc., except when they begin with a personal name.

The Westminster Bank, the Ministry of Education, the public library, the Grand Hotel, the War Office, the Army and Navy Stores

But:

Barclays Bank, Lloyd's Bank, Selfridge's, Woolworth's, Clark's Picture Gallery

We always say *the* Albert Hall, however, in spite of the fact that it begins with a personal name; and the same applies to a few other well-known halls, e.g. the Usher Hall.

The names of railway stations, when they are also place names, as most of them are, are not preceded by *the*.

Euston Station, St. Pancras Station, Lime Street Station (Liverpool), New Street Station (Birmingham)

We speak of Waterloo Station and Victoria Station (in London) because the names have been given to the surrounding districts, though they took their names from the battle of Waterloo and from Queen Victoria respectively. There

are Victoria Stations in several other large towns, and these are usually referred to locally as 'the Victoria Station'.

Note: Cambridge University, Sheffield University, etc., but the University of Cambridge, the University of Sheffield.

**12** Though, following the rule given above, the name of a large store or works may not take the definite article, its sub-departments do.

The travel department at Harrod's  
The overseas department of Lloyd's Bank  
The melting shop at Hadfield's Foundry

**13** Use *the* before the names of ships and trains, even if they do not form part of the name itself.

The *Queen Elizabeth* is a famous British liner.  
The *Golden Arrow* is an express train which runs from London to Paris each day.

But when the name of a particular type of vehicle is used to name a means of travel, there is no definite article.

We are going to London by train.  
I go to work by bus.  
The fastest means of travel is by aeroplane (or *by air*).

**14** *The* is left out of the expressions *all day* and *all night*, but it should be used in similar adverbial expressions for other divisions of time: *all the morning*, *all the afternoon*, *all the evening*, *all the week*.

I have worked hard all day. (not *all the day*)  
The nurse stayed up all night with the patient. (not *all the night*)

But:

It has been raining all the morning.

Americans often say *all morning*, *all week*, etc. This is now frequently heard in England also, and is becoming normal British usage.

**15** *The* is used before a singular noun to express what we call 'the generic singular', i.e., the one thing mentioned is taken to represent all of that kind.

The tiger and the cat belong to the same family of animals.

The elephant is very strong.

The aeroplane is the fastest means of travel that is in common use.

*N.B.* An exception to the above rule is the noun *man* when it is used to denote the human race as a whole.

Man is the only creature that has developed the power of speech. (not *the man*)

Man does not live by bread alone.

**16** Note the omission of *the* in such expressions as *go to school*, *go to church*, *go to hospital*, *go to prison*. There are parallel expressions which use *the*, but in the case of these latter the reference is merely to the building. When *the* is omitted, the reference is to the purpose for which the building exists.

The children go to school.

If you are seriously ill you will have to go to hospital.

But:

The stranger went to the school to complain about the behaviour of one of the pupils.

I am going to the hospital to visit a sick friend.

We always say *go to work*, but *go to the office*. (not *go to office*)

#### EXERCISES

**1** Fill in the blank spaces in the following sentences with the word given in brackets at the end, using either the plain noun, or the noun preceded by *the* (whichever you think is correct).

a The box was made of .... (wood)

b Some coins are made of . . . . and some of .... (silver, copper)

c .... in that stream is not suitable for drinking. (water)

d .... is found in Australia and South Africa. (gold)

e .... that we had for dinner was tough. (meat)

- f* In Britain more people drink .... than .... (tea, coffee)  
*g* When do you have .... ? (breakfast)  
*h* There is fish for .... today. (dinner)  
*i* Are you attending .... tonight? (dinner)  
*j* .... are grown in Spain, South Africa, Brazil and Israel. (oranges)  
*k* We wear .... to keep us warm. (clothes)  
*l* .... are not allowed to park here. (cars)  
*m* .... in that vase are very beautiful. (flowers)  
*n* Let us have a game of .... (cricket)  
*o* She plays .... very well. (tennis)  
*p* What are we having for .... ? (lunch)  
*q* .... in that field is very green. (grass)  
*r* Do you usually drink .... or .... ? (tea, coffee)  
*s* .... are used in some countries to pull heavy loads. (elephants)  
*t* She thanked me for .... I gave her. (present)

**2** Fill in the blank spaces in the following sentences with the word or words given in brackets at the end. Use either the plain noun, or the noun preceded by *the* (whichever you think correct).

- a* In Austria the people speak .... (German)  
*b* .... is spoken in many countries. (English)  
*c* .... have been a sea-faring people for many centuries. (English)  
*d* Can you speak .....? (French)  
*e* .... are a very musical nation. (Italians)  
*f* Many great ships cross .... (Atlantic Ocean)  
*g* .... is a very large country in .... (India, Asia)  
*h* We arranged to meet outside .... (Woolworth's)  
*i* His uncle is manager of .... in this town. (Overseas Bank)  
*j* He came for an hour, but stayed all .... (evening)

**3** Take each of the following nouns and compose two sentences in which it is included. In the first sentence use the plain noun (i.e., without *the*), in the second the noun preceded by *the*.

air, iron, rice, flour, meat, water, paper, grapes, horses, boys

4 In the following passage a number is placed in each of the blank spaces. Fill in the space with the word or expression which has the same number in the list given at the foot of the passage. Insert *the* before the word or expression if you think it necessary.

My uncle lives in a large house built of (1). He works in (2) of (3), which is situated in (4). He goes there by (5) every morning, and stays there all (6). When he comes home in (7) he often feels tired. As soon as he gets in he has a cup of (8), and after that he feels refreshed. When he has had a meal he sits down and reads (9) which he bought on his way home. When he has finished with (10) he will sit listening to (11), or smoking. He sometimes smokes a pipe, but he prefers (12).

*List of words and phrases to be inserted*

- |                  |            |                |
|------------------|------------|----------------|
| 1. stone         | 5. bus     | 9. newspaper   |
| 2. local office  | 6. day     | 10. newspaper  |
| 3. Barclays Bank | 7. evening | 11. radio      |
| 4. East Street   | 8. coffee  | 12. cigarettes |

5 Fill in the blank spaces in the following sentences with the noun given in brackets at the end. Insert *the* before the noun wherever you think it necessary.

- a He was found guilty of theft and sent to . . . for six months. (prison)
- b My son will be old enough to go to . . . next May. (school)
- c I must go to . . . to see the headmaster. (school)
- d My wife has gone to . . . to visit a sick friend. (hospital)
- e He is very ill, and has to go to . . . (hospital)
- f Mr Smith and his family generally go to . . . on Sunday morning. (church)
- g John is ill, so he cannot go to . . . (school)
- h The vicar has gone to . . . to inspect the damage done by the gale. (church)
- i I feel tired, as I went to . . . late last night. (bed)
- j In Britain many people do not go to . . . on Saturday morning. (business)
- k I no longer go to . . . on Saturdays. (office)
- l I have not been to . . . for several months. (cinema)



- m* Some of the visitors came by ....., others by ..... (train, bus)  
*n* Are you going to India by ..... or by .....? (sea, air)  
*o* We sail tomorrow on ..... (*Dunbar Castle*)

## B. THE INDEFINITE ARTICLE (*A* and *AN*)

**1** Remember that *a* is used before words beginning with a consonant, and *an* before words beginning with a vowel or with a letter *h* which is not sounded. The following is a list of the chief words in English which are spelt with an unsounded *h*.

Heir, heiress, heirloom, honest, honesty, honorarium, honorary, honour, honourable, honoured, hour, hourly.

The *h* of hotel is now generally sounded. Write *a hotel*. *An hotel* is rather old-fashioned.

**2** *A*, not *an*, must be used before words which begin with a vowel symbol pronounced with the same sound as the *y* in *yet*.

Such words are: Europe, European, uniform, union, unique, Unitarian, united, universal, university, usual.

Switzerland is a European country. (not *an European*)  
 I hope to go to a university. (not *an university*)

**3** Do not omit *a/an* before a singular noun standing for things that can be counted.

Rice is *a* cereal. London is *a* city. A dog is *an* animal.

*A/an* must also be used when the noun is preceded by an adjective. In such cases it goes before the adjective.

London is *a* big city. (not *London is big city*)  
 A lion is *a* dangerous animal. (not ..... *is dangerous animal*)

Not only are living creatures, plants, material objects, and natural features such as rivers, lakes, hills and seas countable; so also are such things as rewards, punishments, penalties and salaries. They must therefore have the article before them when used in the singular.

He was given *a* reward for his bravery.  
 If you are promoted, you will get *a* higher salary.  
 The court imposed *a* heavy penalty.