



Unit 32 – A / An, The & Zero article (*Should education be free.. The education system..*)

A) In English, there are times in which countable and uncountable nouns do not have a preceding **definite** (the) or **indefinite** (a/an) article. This is referred to as the **Zero Article** and is used to refer to nouns in a general sense.

Note: -> A complete review of definite & indefinite articles is found in Units #48-50 of the Intermediate Section.

In many cases, a noun with a zero article could actually be represented using a definite or indefinite article. For example, the uncountable noun, *juice*, refers to an unspecified quantity and could also take the quantifier, *some*.

-> There is \emptyset **juice** in the fridge if you'd like.

-> There is **some juice** in the fridge if you'd like.

Plural countable nouns such as *boxes* or *volunteers* can also denote an indefinite amount:

-> On moving day, there were \emptyset **boxes** all over the floor.

-> The park was filled with \emptyset **volunteers** for the event.

A generic reference can also be made to plural countable nouns when referred to collectively.

-> \emptyset **Students** have access to online education these days. (denotes students in general)

-> \emptyset **Dogs** certainly make a terrific companion to people. (refers to dogs as a collective species)

B) Abstract Nouns such as *education*, *beauty* and *intelligence* can refer to the general concept or state of a noun when preceded by the zero article. This typically denotes a different meaning than when preceded by the definite or indefinite article:

-> Should \emptyset **education** be free? -> general reference to the concept of free education

-> The **education system** in Korea is great. -> definite article: specific reference made to Korea

-> A good **education** is quite important. -> indefinite article: nonspecific reference to education

C) Proper nouns such as those found in people and places can also take the zero article:

-> \emptyset **Jennifer** is a professor at a prestigious university in Tokyo, Japan.

-> My niece is currently attending \emptyset **Columbia University**.

-> She lives in \emptyset **Rome**, Italy with her family. They have a cottage on \emptyset **Lake Tahoe**. It's beautiful.

D) Zero article often comes before breakfast, lunch, etc. or an institution such as school or church.

-> Mike skips \emptyset **breakfast** every morning. Melissa is starting \emptyset **university** this fall.

-> The **breakfast** we had was delicious! He was sent to the **state jail** for high risk offenders.

-> They serve an **amazing** breakfast there! She works at an **office building** downtown.

E) Days, months, seasons, holidays – note the variation in the examples and the specific rules:

-> In \emptyset **summer**, we often travel together. *or: In the **summer**, we often travel together. (both are possible)*

-> \emptyset **July** is my favorite month of the year! My grandparents often visit us in \emptyset **September**.

-> I visit my Aunt after church on \emptyset **Sunday**. I'll visit you on the **second Sunday** next month.

-> \emptyset **Christmas** was on a **Monday** last year. Let's schedule our meeting on a **Friday** next month.

-> \emptyset **Easter** is my favorite holiday. That was the **Easter** that the cat stepped in the pie.

F) Modes of transportation are often preceded by the zero article when they take the preposition **by**:

-> We got here by \emptyset **train**, but we're going home by \emptyset **bus**.

-> I can't contact that company by \emptyset **phone**; only by \emptyset **email**.

Note, however that a definite or indefinite article is needed if the noun is not preceded by the preposition **by**:

-> We ran to greet my cousin as soon as she got off the **train**.

-> She took a **bullet train** to get to the meeting on short notice.

-> It's not recommended to send money or valuables through the **mail**.

G) Parallel Structures – in expressions where two related nouns are joined, both nouns may take a zero article:

-> We went from \emptyset **place to place** downtown. I drove from \emptyset **drugstore to drugstore** to find Tylenol.

-> There's a bond between \emptyset **father and son**. She quickly transitioned from \emptyset **amateur to professional**.



H) Other common uses of the zero article:

- i) Job titles -> Mr. Smith is \emptyset **senior manager** at Fitz. (denotes *the one* senior manager at Fitz)
- > Mr. Smith is **a senior manager** at Fitz. (denotes *one of many* senior managers at Fitz)
- ii) Home & work -> I get \emptyset **home** at 8pm each night. What time do you get to \emptyset **work** every morning?
- iii) Certain illness -> My grandmother has \emptyset **cancer**. My niece suffers from \emptyset **asthma**.
- iv) Certain materials/minerals (wood, glass, gold, etc.) This ornament is actually made of \emptyset **wood**.
- v) Towns -> We're driving into \emptyset **town** today. *but:* We live in the city. / They live in the countryside.

Unit 32 – Exercises:

32.1 – Write **a, an, the** or \emptyset (zero article) in each sentence. (32-All)

1. Paul: What did you have for \emptyset lunch? Amy: We had brunch at a lovely restaurant downtown.
2. It's late. You should go to ___ bed. What time do you have to arrive at ___ office tomorrow morning?
3. Sean is thinking of going to ___ university next year. He'd like to do ___ degree at ___ Columbia.
4. My dad went to school to talk to ___ teacher. He wanted to get ___ feedback about my behavior.
5. Sam went to ___ church to pray for his Aunt. James went to ___ old church to see its architectural beauty.
6. ___ Whales are extraordinary. ___ North Atlantic Right Whale is ___ critically endangered species in Canada.
7. ___ Humans have been destroying the planet. What can be done to save ___ planet from ___ climate change?
8. I can't recall the exact date of ___ wedding, but I remember it was on ___ Saturday evening in ___ October and there were plenty of people at ___ church.

32.2 – If necessary, correct any mistakes in the following sentences. (32-All)

1. A: Do you take any sugar in your coffee? B: No, thanks, I'll just have a little milk.
2. Ashley is vegetarian. She eats vegetables and wheat-based foods with every meal.
3. All of last year, I managed to save money for our upcoming vacation. We're going to have great time!
4. Friendship is something that I cherish. friends that I have are kind. We became a friends in high school.
5. She took umbrella with her but it didn't rain all the day at all. She had wonderful time at the park.
6. Oh, this is invitation to dinner to celebrate Lisa and Matt's wedding anniversary next month.
7. My neighbor, Chris, is painter. Why don't we ask him for a help painting our garage?
8. A: I've been working so hard lately! It's about a time for break. B: Great! Let's meet up on Saturday!

32.3 – Complete both pairs (a & b) using one word from the box. Add **a, an** or **the** where necessary. (32-E/F)

phone / Saturday / July / Christmas

- 1 a) Despite _____ being in December, _____ travel season is the busiest time of the year at airports.
b) _____ mornings were the best. _____ that we spent in Boston was unforgettable!
- 2 a) Do you have any plans on _____, June 23rd? We're planning to go camping.
b) Oh is that _____ after the final exam? Sure, I'd love to go camping with you!
- 3 a) Do you remember _____ that we spent at camp? That was one of my favorite memories!
b) I love spending summers in Canada. _____ is especially my favorite time of the year.
- 4 a) A: Can you believe that the package still hasn't arrived? B: Did you try contacting the company by _____?
b) A: I did but _____ just kept ringing. Nobody picked up!

32.4 – Insert the following word pairs into the sentences. Add **a, an** or **the** where needed. (32-H)

(~~director / female~~) (town / hardware store) (glass / material) (dementia / disease) (work / home)

1. My mom has just been promoted to **director**. She is now **the** only **female** director at her company.
2. Sadly, Mr. Smith has been diagnosed with _____. _____ is known to be incurable.
3. Do you need anything in _____ this afternoon? I'm visiting _____ to pick up a few things.
4. A: What time did you get _____ last night? B: Well I left _____ at 6:30pm and arrived _____ at 7:15pm.
5. A: What was _____ used to make this ornament? It's beautiful! B: It's actually made of _____.