

# UNIT 71 A/an and the

a) Study this example:

For lunch I had **a** sandwich and **an** apple. **The** sandwich wasn't very nice.

The speaker says 'a sandwich / an apple' because this is the first time he talks about them.

The speaker says 'the sandwich' because the listener now knows which sandwich he means – the sandwich he had for lunch.

Here are some more examples:

- There was **a** man talking to a woman outside my house. **The** man looked English but I think **the** woman was foreign.
- When we were on holiday, we stayed at **a** hotel. In the evenings, sometimes we had dinner at **the** hotel and sometimes in a restaurant.
- I saw **a** film last night. **The** film was about **a** soldier and a beautiful girl. **The** soldier was in love with **the** girl but **the** girl was in love with **a** teacher. So **the** soldier shot **the** teacher and married **the** girl.

b) We use **a/an** when the listener doesn't know which thing we mean. We use **the** when it is clear which thing we mean:

- Tom sat down on **a** chair. (we don't know which chair)  
Tom sat down on **the** chair nearest **the** door. (we know which chair)
- Ann is looking for **a** job. (not a particular job)  
Did Ann get **the** job she applied for? (a particular job)
- Have you got **a** car? (not a particular car)  
I cleaned **the** car yesterday. (a particular car, my car)

c) We use **the** when it is clear in the situation which thing or person we mean. For example, in a room we talk about 'the light / the floor / the ceiling / the door / the carpet' etc. Study these examples:

- Can you turn off **the** light, please? (= the light in this room)
- Where is **the** toilet, please? (= the toilet in this building/house)
- **The** postman was late this morning. (= our usual postman)
- I took a taxi to **the** station. (= the station of that town)
- We got to **the** airport just in time for our flight.

Also: **the** police / **the** fire-brigade / **the** army.

We also say **the** bank, **the** post office:

- I must go to **the** bank to change some money and then I'm going to **the** post office to buy some stamps. (The speaker is usually thinking of a particular bank or post office.)

We also say **the** doctor, **the** dentist:

- John isn't very well. He has gone to **the** doctor. (= his doctor)

For the see also Units 72–7.

## UNIT 71 Exercises

**71.1** In this exercise you have to put in a/an or the.

Example: There was ..... a ..... man and ..... a ..... woman in the room. ..... The ..... man was English but ..... the ..... woman looked foreign. She was wearing ..... a ..... fur coat.

- 1 This morning I bought ..... newspaper and ..... magazine. .... newspaper is in my bag but I don't know where ..... magazine is.
- 2 My parents have ..... cat and ..... dog. .... dog never bites ..... cat but ..... cat often scratches ..... dog.
- 3 I saw ..... accident this morning. .... car crashed into ..... wall. .... driver of ..... car was not hurt but ..... car was quite badly damaged.
- 4 When you turn into Lipson Road, you will see three houses: ..... red one, ..... blue one and ..... white one. I live in ..... white one.
- 5 We live in ..... old house in ..... middle of the village. There is ..... beautiful garden behind ..... house. .... roof of ..... house is in very bad condition.

**71.2** Here again you have to put in a/an or the.

Examples: I'm looking for ..... a ..... job. Did Ann get ..... the ..... job she applied for?

- 1 Would you like ..... apple?
- 2 Could you close ..... door, please?
- 3 We live in ..... small flat near ..... centre of the city.
- 4 Have you finished with ..... book I lent you last week?
- 5 We went out for ..... meal last night. .... restaurant we went to was excellent.
- 6 Did ..... police find ..... person who stole your bicycle?
- 7 This is a nice house. Has it got ..... garden?
- 8 It was warm and sunny, so we decided to sit in ..... garden.
- 9 This morning I had ..... boiled egg and toast for breakfast.
- 10 ..... President of the United States is elected every four years.
- 11 As I was walking along the street, I saw ..... £10 note on ..... pavement.
- 12 I went into the shop and asked to speak to ..... manager.
- 13 'Have you got ..... car?' 'No, I've never had ..... car in my life.'
- 14 There's no need to buy any milk. .... milkman brings it every morning.

**71.3** Now you have to complete these sentences using the + noun.

Example: It was getting dark in the room, so I turned on ..... the light.

- 1 There were no chairs so we all had to sit on .....
- 2 As soon as I saw the fire, I called .....
- 3 We didn't have any stamps, so we had to go to .....
- 4 I had a toothache, so I made an appointment with .....
- 5 Ann had to catch a train, so I took her to .....
- 6 When we found that someone had broken into our house, we called .....
- 7 Bill wasn't feeling well, so he went to .....
- 8 We didn't have any money, so we had to go to .....
- 9 The plane was delayed, so we had to wait at ..... for three hours.