

## 9 days, months and seasons

We drop *the* when we mean 'the day/month before or after this one'.

Where were you last Saturday? See you on Thursday.

I was away in April. We're moving next September.

To talk about the seasons in general, we can say *spring* or *the spring*, *summer* or *the summer*, etc. There is little difference.

Rome is lovely in (the) spring. I like (the) winter best.

When we are talking about particular springs, summers etc, we are more likely to use *the*.

I worked very hard in the summer that year.

## 10 musical instruments

We often use *the* + singular when we talk about musical instruments in general, or about playing musical instruments.

The violin is really difficult. Who's that on the piano?

But *the* is often dropped when talking about jazz or pop, and sometimes when talking about classical music.

This recording was made with Miles Davis on trumpet.

She studied oboe and saxophone at the Royal Academy of Music.

## 11 (the) radio, (the) cinema, (the) theatre and television

When we talk about our use of these forms of entertainment, we generally say *the radio*, *the cinema*, *the theatre*, but *television* or *TV*.

I always listen to the radio while I'm driving.

It was a great treat to go to the cinema or the theatre when I was a child.

What's on TV?

*The* is often dropped in all four cases when we talk about these institutions as art forms or professions.

Cinema is different from theatre in several ways.

He's worked in radio and television all his life.

## 12 jobs and positions

*The* is not used in titles like *Queen Elizabeth*, *President Lincoln*. Compare:

Queen Elizabeth had dinner with President Kennedy.

The Queen had dinner with the President.

And *the* is not usually used in the complement of a sentence, when we say that somebody has or gains a unique position (the only one in the organisation). Compare:

— They appointed him Head Librarian. — He was elected President in 1879.

Where's the librarian?

I want to see the President.

## 13 exclamations

We use *a/an* with singular countable nouns in exclamations after *What*.

What a lovely dress! (NOT ~~What lovely dress!~~)

Note that *a/an* cannot be used in exclamations with uncountable nouns.

What nonsense! (NOT ~~What a nonsense!~~)

What luck!

## 14 illnesses

The names of illnesses and pains are usually uncountable, with no article, in standard British English (for more details, see 148.7).

Have you had appendicitis? I've got toothache again.

*Alan* is used in a few cases such as *a cold*, *a headache*.

I've got a horrible cold. Have you got a headache?

*The* can be used informally with a few common illnesses.

I think I've got (the) flu. She's never had (the) measles.

American usage is different in some cases.

I've got a toothache / an earache / a backache / a stomachache. (BrE I've got toothache/earache etc)

## 15 parts of the body etc

When talking about parts of someone's body, or about their possessions, we usually use possessives, not *the*.

Katy broke her arm climbing. (NOT ~~Katy broke the arm climbing.~~)

He stood in the doorway, his coat over his arm. (NOT ~~...the coat over the arm.~~)

But *the* is common after prepositions, especially when we are talking about blows, pains and other things that often happen to parts of people's bodies.

She hit him in the stomach. He was shot in the leg.

Can't you look me in the eye?

## 16 measurements

Note the use of *the* in measuring expressions beginning with *by*.

Do you sell eggs by the kilo or by the dozen?

He sits watching TV by the hour. Can I pay by the month?

*Alan* is used to relate one measuring unit to another.

sixty pence a kilo thirty miles an hour twice a week

## 17 place names

We use *the* with these kinds of place names:

- seas (*the Atlantic*)
- mountain groups (*the Himalayas*)
- island groups (*the West Indies*)
- rivers (*the Rhine*)
- deserts (*the Sahara*)
- most hotels (*the Grand Hotel*)
- most cinemas and theatres (*the Odeon; the Playhouse*)
- most museums and art galleries (*the British Museum; the Frick*)

We usually use no article with:

- continents, countries, states, counties, departments etc (*Africa, Brazil, Texas, Berkshire, Westphalia*)
- towns (*Oxford*)
- streets (*New Street, Willow Road*)
- lakes (*Lake Michigan*)

Exceptions: places whose name is (or contains) a common noun like *republic*, *state*, *union* (e.g. *the People's Republic of China, the United Kingdom, the United States*).

Note also *the Netherlands*, and its seat of government *The Hague*.

*The* is unusual in the titles of the principal public buildings and organisations of a town, when the title begins with the town name.

Oxford University (NOT ~~the Oxford University~~)

Hull Station (NOT ~~the Hull Station~~)

Salisbury Cathedral Manchester City Council

Birmingham Airport Cheltenham Football Club

With the names of less important institutions, usage varies.

(*The East Oxford Community Centre. (The) Newbury School of English.*)

Names of single mountains vary. Most have no article.

Everest Kilimanjaro Snowdon Table Mountain

But definite articles are usually translated in the English versions of European mountain names, except those beginning *Le Mont*.

*The Meije* (= *La Meije*) *The Matterhorn* (= *Das Matterhorn*)  
BUT *Mont Blanc* (NOT ~~the Mont Blanc~~)

## 18 newspapers and magazines

The names of newspapers usually have *the*.

*The Times The Washington Post*

The names of magazines do not always have *the*.

*New Scientist*

## 19 abbreviated styles

We usually leave out articles in abbreviated styles (see 1).

newspaper headlines	MAN KILLED ON MOUNTAIN	
headings	Introduction Chapter 2	Section B
picture captions	Mother and child	
notices, posters etc	SUPER CINEMA, RITZ HOTEL	
instructions	Open packet at other end.	
numbering and labelling	Go through door A.	
	Control to Car 27: can you hear me?	
	Turn to page 26. (NOT <del>...the page 26.</del> )	
dictionary entries	palm inner surface of hand...	
lists	take car to garage; pay phone bill; ...	
notes	J thinks company needs new office	

70/1 bed

It's time to go to bed

Do you ever have breakfast in bed?

but: I sat down on the bed. (just a piece of furniture)

work

go to work, be at work, start/finish work

home

go home, come home, arrive home, get home, be at home

sea

go to sea, be at sea ('be / go on a voyage')

Keith works on ships. He's at sea most of the time

but:

## SOURCES:

M. SWAN: *Practical English Usage*, Oxford University Press, 2009

J. EASTWOOD: *Oxford Learner's Grammar, Grammar Finder*, Oxford University Press, 2009

R. MURPHY: *English Grammar In Use*, Cambridge University Press, 2004