

83 A/an and the (1)

1 Introduction

Read this true story about an American tourist in Britain.

*A **man** from California was spending **a month** in Britain. One day he booked into **a hotel** in Cheltenham, **a nice old town** in **the West** of England. Then he went out to look around **the place**. But **the man** didn't return to **the hotel**. He disappeared, leaving **a suitcase** full of clothes behind. **The police** were called in, but they were unable to find out what had happened to **the missing tourist**. It was **a mystery**. But two weeks later **the man** walked into **the police station** in Cheltenham. He explained that he was very sorry, but while walking around **the town**, he had got lost. He had also forgotten **the name** of **the hotel** he had booked into. So he had decided to continue with his tour of **the country** and had gone to visit **a friend** in Scotland before returning to pick up **the case** he had left behind.*

A/an goes only with a singular noun. With a plural or an uncountable noun we use **some**.

*He left **a case**.* (singular)

*He left **some cases**.* (plural)

*He left **some luggage**.* (uncountable)

The goes with both singular and plural nouns and with uncountable nouns.

*He needed **the case**.* (singular)

*He needed **the cases**.* (plural)

*He needed **the luggage**.* (uncountable)

2 Use

When the story first mentions something, the noun has a or an.

***A man** booked into **a hotel** in Cheltenham.*

These phrases are new information. We do not know which man or which hotel.

But when the same thing is mentioned again, the noun has **the**.

***The man** didn't return to **the hotel**.*

These phrases are old information. Now we know which man and which hotel – the ones already mentioned earlier in the story. We use **the** when it is clear which one we mean.

A/AN

*Would you like to see **a show**?*

(I don't say which show.)

*The cyclist was hit by **a car**.*

(I don't say which car.)

*In the office **a phone** was ringing.*

(The office has lots of phones.)

*Has Melanie got **a garden**?*

(We do not know if there is one.)

*The train stopped at **a station**.*

(We don't know which station.)

*We took **a taxi**.*

*We could hear **a noise**.*

*I wrote the number on **an envelope**.*

THE

*Would you like to see **the show**?*

(= the show we already mentioned)

*Whose is **the car** outside?*

('Outside' explains which car I mean.)

*I was in bed when **the phone** rang.*

(= the phone in my house)

*She was at home in **the garden**.*

(We know she has one.)

*Turn left here for **the station**.*

(= the station in this town)

*We went in **the car**.* (= my/our car)

*We could hear **the noise** of a party.*

*I wrote it on **the back** of an envelope.*

3 A man/he and the man/someone

We use **a/an** + noun or **someone/something** when we aren't saying which one.

***A man/Someone** booked into a hotel.*

*He left **a case/something** behind.*

We use **the** + noun or **he/she/it** when we know which one.

***The man/He** didn't return to the hotel.*

***The case/It** contained clothes.*

Practice

A The use of a/an and the (1–3)

Complete this true story. Put in *a/an* or *the*.

▶ A man decided to rob (1) bank in the town where he lived. He walked into (2) bank and handed (3) note to one of (4) cashiers. (5) cashier read (6) note, which told her to give (7) man some money. Afraid that he might have (8) gun, she did as she was told. (9) man then walked out of (10) building, leaving (11) note behind. However, he had no time to spend (12) money because he was arrested (13) same day. He had made (14) mistake. He had written (15) note on (16) back of (17) envelope. And on (18) other side of (19) envelope was his name and address. This clue was quite enough for (20) detectives on the case.

B A man/he and the man/someone (3)

Replace the sentences which contain an underlined word. Use *a/an* or *the* with the word in brackets.

- ▶ We didn't have much time for lunch. David made something for us. (omelette)
David made an omelette for us.
- 1 They ran the race before they held the long jump. Matthew won it easily. (race)

- 2 The driver turned left. Suddenly someone ran into the road. (child)

- 3 Vicky was lying on the sofa. She was watching something on television. (film)

- 4 I had to take a train and then a bus. It was half an hour late. (bus)

- 5 A shoplifter tried to steal some clothes. The camera videoed her. (thief)

C The use of a/an and the (1–3)

Complete the conversations. Put in *a/an* or *the*.

- ▶ Laura: Look outside. The sky is getting very dark.
 Trevor: I hope there isn't going to be a storm.
- 1 Mike: I'm going out for walk. Have you seen my shoes?
 Harriet: Yes, they're on floor in kitchen.
- 2 Melanie: Would you like tomato? There's one in fridge.
 David: Oh, yes, please. I'll make myself cheese and tomato sandwich.
- 3 Sarah: If you're going into city centre, can you post these letters for me?
 Mark: Yes, I'll take them to main post office.
- 4 Rita: I've got problem with my phone bill. Can I see someone about it?
 Receptionist: Yes, go to fifth floor. lift is along the corridor.
- 5 Tom: I didn't know Melanie had dog.
 David: It isn't hers. She's just taking it for a walk while owner is away.
- 6 Vicky: I've got headache. I've had it all day.
 Rachel: Why don't you go to health centre? It's open until six.
- 7 Andrew: Guess what. I found £50 note on the pavement this morning.
 Jessica: You really ought to take it to police station, you know.