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Articles

An article is a short monosyllabic word that is used to define if the noun is specific or not. Articles are normally used before nouns and since they are used to speak about the noun, they can be considered as adjectives.

Look at how various dictionaries define an article to have a much clearer idea of what they are.

Definition of an Article

An article, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is defined as “any of a small set of words or affixes (such as a, an, and the) used with nouns to limit or give definiteness to the application.” According to the Collins Dictionary, “an article is a kind of determiner. In English, ‘a’ and ‘an’ are called the indefinite article, and ‘the’ is called the definite article.” The Macmillan Dictionary defines an article as “a type of determiner (=word used before a noun) that shows whether you are referring to a particular thing or to a general example of something. The indefinite article is ‘a’ or ‘an’ and the definite article is ‘the’.”

Types of Articles

There are three articles in English – ‘a’, ‘an’ and ‘the’. These articles are divided into two types namely:

- Definite Article
- Indefinite Article

Definite Article

Among the three articles, ‘the’ is said to be the definite article. A definite article is used to determine something that is specific or particular. It is also used before plural nouns and to indicate the superlative degree of comparison. Furthermore, it can be used before collective nouns as well.

For example:

- **The** Sun sets in **the** west.

In the above sentence, the nouns ‘Sun’ and ‘west’ are proper nouns and are specific and so the definite article has to be used.

- **The** children are playing cricket.

In the above sentence, the definite article is used to determine the plural noun, ‘children’.

- This is **the** world’s longest river.

In the above sentence, the definite article is used to denote the superlative degree of comparison.

- **The** crowd sang along with **the** band.

In the above sentence, the definite article is used before the collective nouns, ‘crowd’ and ‘band’.

Indefinite Article

The articles ‘an’ and ‘a’ are termed as indefinite articles. An indefinite article, as the name suggests, is used to indicate something that is not definite or specific. It can also be used before singular nouns.

Among the indefinite articles, ‘an’ is used before singular nouns that start with vowel sounds and ‘a’ is used before singular nouns that begin with consonant sounds.

For example:

- I had **an** apple for breakfast.
- Do you have **an** eraser?
- I saw **an** aeroplane.
- She has **a** pet dog.
- My father is **a** doctor.
- My brother gave me **a** calculator.

Usage and Exceptions – Points to be Remembered When Using Articles

Articles are used extensively by English language users, and for this very reason, it is important to know where and where not to use them. In order to have a thorough

knowledge of how to use the right articles in the right places, have a look at the following.

A or An?

The article 'an' is normally used before words that begin with vowel sounds. However, this is often confused with the idea that it can be used before words that start with a vowel. Look at the examples given below to understand how this works.

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- I have **an** umbrella.
- This is **an** orange.
- **An** elephant was crossing the road.

If you see here, the words 'university' and 'unique' start with a vowel. However, it does not have a vowel sound but a consonant sound 'yu' in the beginning. It is because of this reason that the indefinite article, 'a' is used instead of 'an'.

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- Studying in **a** university will give you a lot of exposure.
- This is **a** unique way of communicating with birds.

In the examples given below, 'an' is used before 'MBA' and 'hour' though they are words starting with consonants. This is because the word 'MBA' starts with 'm' which has a vowel sound (em) in the beginning. Likewise, the 'h' in the word 'hour' is silent, thus having a vowel sound in the beginning.

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- I have completed **an** MBA degree.
- It took **an** hour to reach the airport.

Exceptions

Words starting with a vowel, but use 'a' instead of 'an':

- One
- University
- Unique
- Uniform
- Unit
- Eucalyptus

- Utensil
- Euro
- UFO

Words starting with a consonant, but use ‘an’ instead of ‘a’.

- Hour
- Honest
- Hourly
- MBA
- MBBS
- MA
- MSc
- MMR
- MCom
- MLA
- NCC
- Honorary
- X-ray
- Xmas

There are also some cases in which you will have to use the indefinite article ‘the’ before a common noun. Look at the following set of sentences to understand how this works.

Example 1: My brother and I are going for **a** wedding reception. **The** reception is held in an open lawn at 7 p.m.

Example 2: I saw **a** dog at the end of the street. **The** dog came running to me.

Example 3: Tharun watched **a** movie yesterday. He felt that **the** movie was too slow.

Examples of Articles

Let us look at a few more examples to find out how articles can be used.

- **The** English teacher is absent today.
- I saw **a** bird sitting on **the** tree in front of my house.
- Not many know how to use **an** oven properly.

- Tom has **a** cat.
- We are going to buy **a** dress for our daughter.
- Carry **an** umbrella. I am sure it will rain.
- Keren found **a** puppy on the road.
- **The** parents have been asked to attend **a** meeting tomorrow.
- **The** committee has decided to bring down **the** fuel rates.
- Due to **a** hartal, **the** shops have been closed.

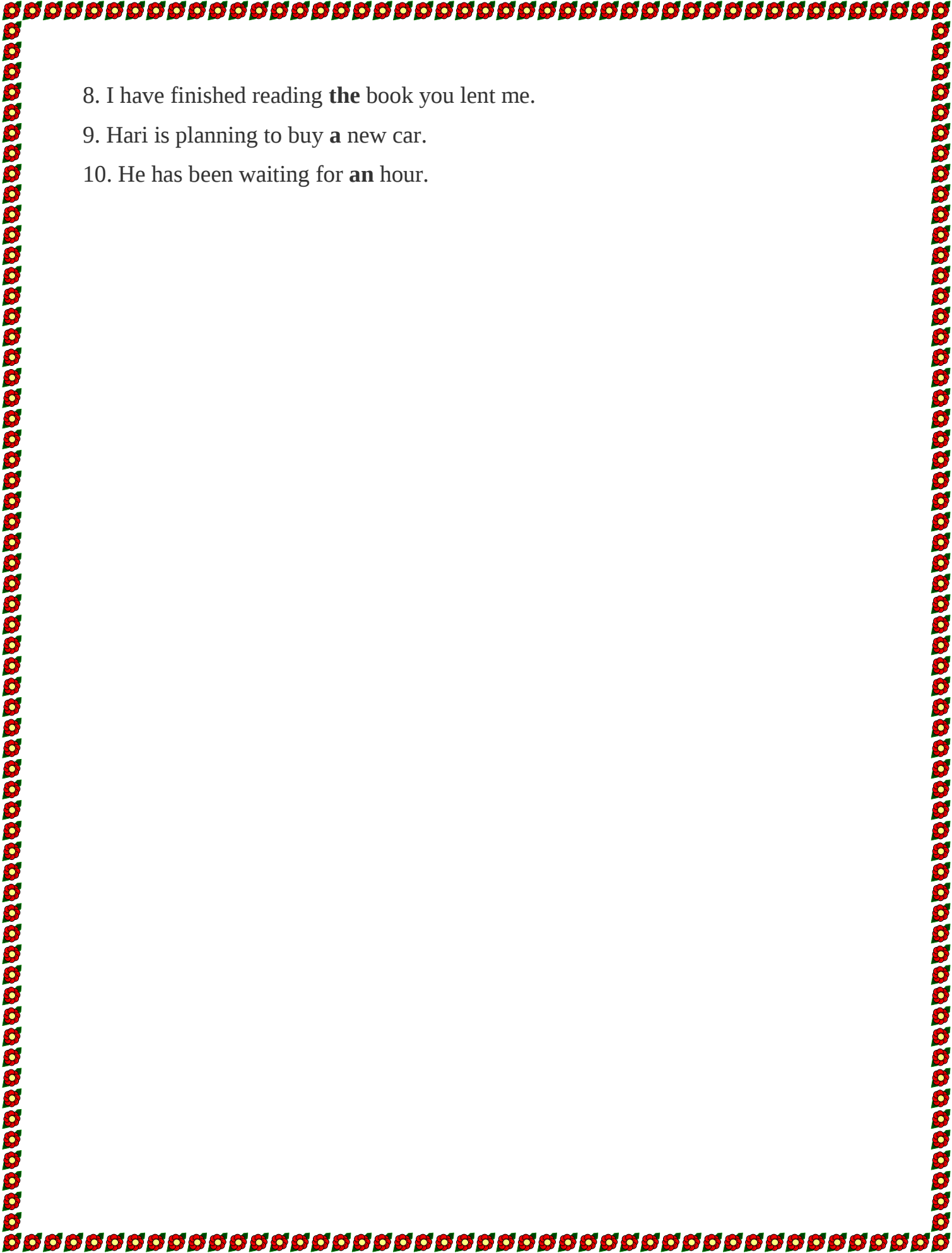
Check Your Understanding of Articles

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate articles in the following sentences:

1. Have you watched _____ new movie?
2. I have never used _____ computer.
3. Do you know _____ multiplication tables?
4. Sandra brought _____ apple.
5. Madhu has _____ teddy bear.
6. _____ chairs are all broken.
7. The janitor asked _____ students to walk carefully as _____ floor was wet.
8. I have finished reading _____ book you lent me.
9. Hari is planning to buy _____ new car.
10. He has been waiting for _____ hour.

Check your answers.

1. Have you watched **the** new movie?
2. I have never used **a** computer.
3. Do you know **the** multiplication tables?
4. Sandra brought **an** apple.
5. Madhu has **a** teddy bear.
6. **The** chairs are all broken.
7. The janitor asked **the** students to walk carefully as **the** floor was wet.



8. I have finished reading **the** book you lent me.

9. Hari is planning to buy **a** new car.

10. He has been waiting for **an** hour.