

Study Materials for IBPS, Bank Exams : English Language : Common Error

1. Articles: There are three articles in English—a, an and the. A and an are called indefinite article. The is the definite article. An article is placed before a noun. If there is an adjective before a noun, the article is placed before the adjective:

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a train,
a fast train,
an incident,
an unusual incident

Note: We can never use a singular count noun alone, that is, without a/an/the/my/some/any etc.

2. A/an: Singular count nouns take the indefinite article a/an with them:

a ball
an egg
a dog
an elephant

Uncount nouns do not generally take an article with them. we do not generally say

a milk
a beauty
a wisdom
for milk, beauty, wisdom cannot be counted.

3. We use a with singular count nouns beginning with a consonant sound:

a girl
a map
a university
a union
a one-sided affair
a one-rupee note

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Note: That the words university, union, and one begin with a vowel but no a vowel sound. University and union begin with the yoo sound while one begins with the w sound.

Well-known words which begin with a vowel but take a with them are:

European
uniform
union
unit
universal
mental

useful
eau-de-cologne

4. An: An is used before words beginning with a vowel sound:

an umbrella
an opportunity
an honest boy
an honourable person

The letter h in honest and honourable is not sounded. Common words in English which begin with an unsounded h are:

heir
heirless
honest
honorary
honourable
hour
hourly

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5. In abbreviations, if consonants begin with a vowel sound, they take an before them:

an M.P.
an S.P.

But if consonants begin with a consonant sound, they take a before them:

a Ph.D.
a B.Ed.

6. Note the use of a in the following phrases:

a pity a shame
a pleasure a noise
a rage a nuisance
a headache a toothache
a bad cold in a whisper
in a low voice in a loud voice
to be at a loss

7. The definite Article the: The, the definite article, is a weakened form of that. It is pronounced as (di:) when it preceded a vowel sound and as do before a consonant sound. In meaning also, it is weaker than that. Instead of pointing out, it defines, particularises or singles out: I have read the book you are talking of. (not any book but a particular book that is being referred to)
The artists who came to see me today are quite accomplished. (not any artists but the ones who came to see me today)

8. In the examples given in § 7, the book and the artists are particularised by two adjective clauses. In certain cases, a noun's being particular may be clear from the context and it may not have any defining expression with it. The is also prefixed to such a noun:

Shut the door. (the door of the room in which we are sitting)

He was brought before the Principal. (The Principal of the Institution in which he was studying)

The king pardoned him. (the king we are talking about at the moment)

9. If I am looking at the picture of a room, I can talk about the ceiling, the floor, because there is only one ceiling and one floor, but I cannot talk about the wall if there are more than one walls in the picture because I would not be talking about the only one. I can, however, talk about the left wall and the right wall because there is only one left wall and one right wall in the picture.

10. More about the:

We use the definite article the

1. with superlatives and the words used in the superlative sense:

the best student in the class
the Chief Justice
the Prime Minister

2. when special emphasis almost equivalent to the use of the superlative is intended:

He is the leader today. (the greatest leader)
This is just the thing. (the right thing)
This is the way to solve this problem. (the proper way).

3. even in comparative degrees when one of the two items is singled out in preference to the other:

He is the moon, the world, (But not: He is the finer batsman than others. The correct form would be : He is a finer bats man than others.)

4. with things of which there is only one in our world, or things which are otherwise well known but do not begin with a capital letter:

the sun, the moon, the world, the equator, the north, the east.

5. in place of possessive adjectives:

I hit him on the head. (= his head) Disappointment stared him in the face. (= his face)

6. with common nouns when one noun is used to represent the whole class or species:

The horse is a faithful animal.
The lion is the king of animals.

7. with an adjective with a plural notion to indicate a class of persons:

The rich should help the poor. (We can say: Rich men should help poor men But not: The rich men should help the poor men.×)

8. as an adverb in case of certain comparatives:

The more we get, the more we want.
The harder you work, the better it will be.

9. to suggest distribution: (= each)

We can buy oranges by the dozen.
Cloth is sold by the metre.

Exercise

Fill in the blanks with a, an or the where necessary:

1. — more you read, — more you know.
2. — stone hit him on — head.
3. — fox is — very clever animal.
4. Only — rich can afford — comforts of — modern times.
5. I have — elder brother and — younger sister. — sister is — wiser of the two.
6. If you are looking for — entertaining as well as educative magazine, this is — magazine for you.
7. — sun rises in — east and sets in — west.
8. India is a little to — north of — equator.
9. — oranges are sold by — dozen.

11. Articles with Proper Nouns

1. Proper nouns, as a rule, do not take articles with them:

Shakespeare was a great playwright. (Shakespeare)

Samudragupta was a great warrior. (Samudragupta)

2. But if a proper noun is used as a common noun, it may take with it some article:

He is a good playwright but not a Shakespeare. (not as great a playwright as Shakespeare)

Kalidas is the Shakespeare of India. (as great a playwright for India as Shakespeare is for England)

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3. We need the definite article the with the names of:

• Rivers	the Ganga, the Yamuna
• Seas and oceans	the Red Sea, the Atlantic Ocean
• Mountain ranges	the Alps, the Himalayas
• Holy books	the Bible, the Ramcharit Manas
• Trains, ships	the Himgiri Express, the Ashoka (the name of a ship).
• Newspapers and	the Pioneer, magazines the Hindustan Times, the Filmfare, the portstar
• Well-known	the Gateway of India, buildings the Red Fort, the Qutub Minar
• Countries	(if their name contains a common noun) the U.S.A., the U.K. (In United States of America, States is a common noun.)
• Peoples, parties	the English, the French, the Whigs
• The whole families	the Khans, the Kapurs

Prepositions

Prepositions

Prepositions of Time

A number of prepositions may be used to denote time: from Monday; after my return; during the night; till tomorrow; before the bell rings; a quarter to ten. In most cases, it is easy to decide which preposition to use. The following prepositions, however, need special attention.

1. At, on, in

1. At usually denotes a definite point of time but can also be used for indefinite periods:

at 7 p.m.; at this moment; (Definite at midnight; point of time)
at the end of the class;
at night; at dawn; (Indefinite at Durga Puja; at Diwali. periods)

2. On is used with days and dates:

on Monday; on 1st May;
on the annual day; on a May afternoon.

3. In is used with parts of the day, and with months, years, seasons:

in the morning; in September;
in 2004; in winter.

4. In is also used with the future tense to show the period in which an action will happen:

in a week; in four hours.

5. In and within. In means at the end of; within means before the end of:

I shall be back in a week. (when a week is over)
I shall be back within a week. (before a week is over)

2. By

By refers to a point of future time and denotes the latest time at which an action will be over:

The competition will be over by 6 p.m.

(It should be over before it is 6 p.m., but the latest time at which it can be over is 6 p.m.)

They will have declared the result by tomorrow evening.

3. For

For is used with periods of time to show the duration of an action. It is mostly used with perfect continuous tenses though it may be found with other tenses as well:

This discussion has been going on for two hours.

I have worked in this office for two years.

For may sometimes be omitted also:

I have been busy the whole morning. (for the whole morning)

4. Since

Since marks the point of time at which an action began. It is used only if the action has continued till the time of speaking; hence it is found with perfect continuous tenses. Unlike for, it can never be omitted:

She has been teaching in this college since 2001.

A cool breeze has been blowing since morning.

5. From

From denotes the starting point of an action and is used in all cases except when the action has continued till the moment of speaking. It is almost invariably used with to or till:

The examination will be held from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.

He was the Chief Minister of the state from 1999 to 2002.

6. At, in

1. At has the idea of an exact point and is, therefore, used with houses, villages, small towns. In has the idea of a larger area and is used while speaking of bigger towns, states, countries, etc.:

at Karol Bagh in New Delhi;
at Ambala; in England;
at the end; in the middle.

2. At conveys the idea of a general neighbourhood; in conveys the idea of something contained:

We say at the table to take our lunch.
Please wait for me at the Regal PVR.
Turn left at the next crossing.
There are two Pepsi bottles in the refrigerator.
You will find the stapler in the drawer.

7. On, upon

On is used while speaking of things at rest; upon is used with things in motion:

The file is on the table.

The dog sprang upon the table.

8. Above, over

Both above and over mean higher than. Sometimes we can use either of them:

The flags waved over our heads.

The flags waved above our heads.

But over can also mean governing, or vertically above:

My father put a blanket over me.
There is a fan exactly over the table.

9. Below, under

Both below and under mean lower than and sometimes we can use either of them. But under means vertically below. It also has the idea of contact:

There was a beautiful lake below us in the valley.
His shoes were lying under the table.
She put the keys of the wardrobe under her pillow.

10. Into

Into denotes movement towards the interior of something:

He jumped into the well.

One stream flows into another.

Figuratively: We have entered into an agreement to export handicrafts to some European countries.

11. For

For is used to denote direction when the verb shows the beginning of a movement:

The children leaves for the school at 7 a.m.

We shall soon set off for Mumbai.

12. Against

Against shows pressure or contact:

He threw the goods against the wall.

Prepositions of direction from. Most common among these are: from, off, out of:

13. From

From is used with the point of departure:

He brought these books from the market.

He had already gone from home.

14. Out of

It is the opposite of into. It means from the interior of:

He took a few books out of the Cupboard.
