

11. The Article

Lesson in a Nutshell

The article (and all modifiers) match the nouns they modify in case, number and gender. They must be able to be masculine **and** feminine **and** neuter nouns. The article changes form (“declines”) according to a 2-1-2 pattern.

English Articles: “A” and “The”

In English there are two kinds of articles, the definite article (“the”) and the indefinite article (“a”).

The definite article “definitizes.” It points to something specifically. Not just any old tree, “*the*” tree. Not just any old monkey, “*the*” monkey.

The indefinite article leaves options open. “A” tree, meaning any old tree. “A” monkey, meaning any old monkey.

If I ask you to bring me **a** cup of coffee you grab any cup and bring it to me, filled with coffee.

But if I ask you to bring me **the** cup of coffee, I have a specific cup of coffee in mind. The definite article takes the general concept and “definitizes” it.

If you are an English speaker you will find this all very natural.

The Greek Article: Three Twists

As we go along, we will find that the Greek article is very helpful in our translation. But there are three twists to the Greek article we must get used to.

Twist #1: No Indefinite Article

There is no indefinite article in Greek. In other words, there is no form of the article specifically to designate that you mean “**a**” monkey. Or, if you prefer, there is no way to be specifically non-specific.

So how does Greek communicate an indefinite idea? Usually by not using the article at all.

ὁ ἄνθρωπος = “the” man.

ἄνθρωπος = “a” man

This is not a hard and fast rule. We will discover many exceptions as we go along.

For example, John 1:1 reads as follows:

— θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος
God was the Word

There is no article before θεος (“God”). Does this mean that “God” is indefinite here, in other words, that the Word was **a** god? If so, then Jesus may be god-like but John is not claiming that he is fully God. This would be contrary to other things that John says about Jesus in his gospel.

What is going on here?

This is an example of the nuanced way that Greek makes use of the article.

One cannot automatically assume that if there is no article that the noun is indefinite (“a”).

One cannot automatically assume that if there is an article that we supply the definite article in our translation (“the”).

John has crafted a remarkably nuanced statement about the nature of Jesus in four words. We will study this more in our next class, *Studies in John*.

Twist #2: Greater Nuance

Greek use of the article is much more nuanced than in English. There are similarities with the use of the English article. But there are also many ways in which the Greek article is used differently than the English article. The only way to get the hang of it will be to read a lot of Greek.

Twist #3: 24 Forms

There are 24 forms of the Greek article.¹ In other words, there are 24 ways to say “the.”

Huh??



Why??

Because in English we use the word “the” whether we are talking about...

the man
the men

the woman
the women

the work
the works

The English article does not change form to match the case, number and gender of the noun it modifies. But in Greek, the article looks like this:

ὁ ἄνθρωπος the man
οἱ ἄνθρωποι the men

ἡ γυνή the woman
αἱ γυναῖκες the women

τὸ ἔργον the work
τὰ ἔργα the works

See how the Greek article changes form? The boring old English article remains static. The fascinating Greek article changes form to match the noun it modifies in case, number and gender.

¹ There are actually fewer forms since some of them repeat, but I find it helpful to think of it this way.

I'll say it again: **The article is changing forms to match the noun it modifies** in:

- case** (nominative, genitive, dative, accusative)
- number** (singular, plural)
- gender** (masculine, feminine, neuter)

Let's take a look at how the nouns "morph" to do this.

Article Morphology

We saw that every noun has case, number and gender. The same will be true with the article.

But there were only eight forms of each noun. There are 24 forms of the article. Why?

Because the nouns were **either** masculine **or** feminine **or** neuter.

But the article has to be able to modify all kinds of nouns. This is why it must be able to be masculine **and** feminine **and** neuter.

So rather than eight forms there are 3 x 8 forms = 24.

$$2 \text{ (numbers)} \times 3 \text{ (genders)} \times 4 \text{ (cases)} = 24 \text{ (forms)}$$

That's...

2 (numbers)

Two Numbers

The Article				
		M	F	N
Singular	Nominative "the"	ὁ	ἡ	τό
	Genitive "of the"	τοῦ	τῆς	τοῦ
	Dative "to the"	τῷ	τῇ	τῷ
	Accusative the	τόν	τήν	τό
Plural	Nominative "the"	οἱ	αἱ	τά
	Genitive "of the"	τῶν	τῶν	τῶν
	Dative "to the"	τοῖς	ταῖς	τοῖς
	Accusative "the"	τούς	τάς	τά

X 3 (genders)

Three Genders

The Article				
		M	F	N
Singular	Nominative "the"	ὁ	ἡ	τό
	Genitive "of the"	τοῦ	τῆς	τοῦ
	Dative "to the"	τῷ	τῇ	τῷ
	Accusative the	τόν	τήν	τό
Plural	Nominative "the"	οἱ	αἱ	τά
	Genitive "of the"	τῶν	τῶν	τῶν
	Dative "to the"	τοῖς	ταῖς	τοῖς
	Accusative "the"	τούς	τάς	τά

X 4 (cases)

Four Cases

The Article				
		M	F	N
Singular	Nominative "the"	ὁ	ἡ	τό
	Genitive "of the"	τοῦ	τῆς	τοῦ
	Dative "to the"	τῷ	τῇ	τῷ
	Accusative the	τόν	τήν	τό
Plural	Nominative "the"	οἱ	αἱ	τά
	Genitive "of the"	τῶν	τῶν	τῶν
	Dative "to the"	τοῖς	ταῖς	τοῖς
	Accusative "the"	τούς	τάς	τά

$$= 24 \text{ (forms)}$$

This is what the 24 forms look like

The Article				
		M	F	N
Singular	Nominative "the"	ὁ	ἡ	τό
	Genitive "of the"	τοῦ	τῆς	τοῦ
	Dative "to the"	τῷ	τῇ	τῷ
	Accusative the	τόν	τήν	τό
Plural	Nominative "the"	οἱ	αἱ	τά
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	Dative "to the"	τοῖς	ταῖς	τοῖς
	Accusative "the"	τούς	τάς	τά

At this point you may be terrified. If there are so many forms of Greek words, what hope is there of ever learning all this!

Don't panic.

It is not nearly as bad as it sounds. The patterns that Greek words follow to tell you their case, number and gender are very regular. In fact, we already know them!

Compare the forms of the article with the noun endings table:

The Article				
		M (2)	F (1)	N (2)
Singular	Nominative "the"	ὁ	ἡ	τό
	Genitive "of the"	τοῦ	τῆς	τοῦ
	Dative "to the"	τῷ	τῇ	τῷ
	Accusative the	τόν	τήν	τό
Plural	Nominative "the"	οἱ	αἱ	τά
	Genitive "of the"	τῶν	τῶν	τῶν
	Dative "to the"	τοῖς	ταῖς	τοῖς
	Accusative "the"	τούς	τάς	τά

Noun Endings		
Masculine (2nd declension)	Feminine (1st declension)	Neuter (2nd declension)
ος <small>λογος</small> word	α or η <small>αρχη</small> beginning	ον <small>εργον</small> work
ου <small>λογου</small> of a word	ας or ης <small>αρχης</small> of a beginning	ου <small>εργου</small> of work
ω <small>λογω</small> to a word	α or η <small>αρχη</small> to a beginning	ω <small>εργω</small> to work
ον <small>λογον</small> word	αν or ην <small>αρχην</small> beginning	ον <small>εργον</small> work
οι <small>λογοι</small> words	αι <small>αρχαι</small> beginnings	α <small>εργα</small> works
ων <small>λογων</small> of words	ων <small>αρχων</small> of beginnings	ων <small>εργων</small> of works
οις <small>λογοις</small> to words	αις <small>αρχαις</small> to beginnings	οις <small>εργοις</small> to works
ους <small>λογους</small> words	ας <small>αρχας</small> beginnings	α <small>εργα</small> works

Do you see the similarities? In most instances, the article looks like the noun ending with a tau attached to the front. Again, mastering Greek is all about learning to see patterns!

Lexical Form of The Article

When you look up the Greek article in a lexicon, it is listed like this:

ὁ, ἡ, τό

Why three forms? Because to know the article we have to know how it behaves in its masculine, feminine and neuter forms. The lexicon gives us this information.

The article follows a 2-1-2 pattern. This means it follows the second declension in the masculine gender, the first declension in the feminine gender and the second declension in the neuter gender.

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
2-1-2	2nd declension	1st declension	2nd declension

More about this in our next lesson.