



Day 20 Explanation

The names of some institutions (such as school or church) have become part of fixed expressions. These fixed expressions use articles a little bit differently from normal.

When we think of certain institutions in general, especially when we think about them being used for their usual purpose (e.g. studying in university, being ill in hospital, praying in church), then we often use them with ‘no article’:

- I’m studying French at Ø university.
- My sister goes to Ø church every Sunday.

On the other hand, if we think about them just as buildings, rather than what they are used for, then we follow the normal rules for articles (as we do for other buildings since they are normal countable nouns):

- I’ll meet you at the university [the listener knows which university building, so I use the].
- She works in a café near a hospital [the listener doesn’t know which hospital building, so I use a].

Here is a more complete list:

church

- We used to go to Ø church every Sunday [intended purpose].
- I’ll meet you outside the church [thinking about a church as a building, so a normal noun – you know which church I mean].

class*

- Where’s Julie? She’s in Ø class [intended purpose].
- John delivered the pizza to the class(room) [normal noun].

college

- She’s at Ø college studying hairdressing [intended purpose].



- The college is next to the station [thinking of a college as a building, normal noun].

court

- He went to Ø court over his divorce [intended purpose].
- The children did a tour of a court [normal noun].

hospital

- Unfortunately, my neighbour is still in Ø hospital [intended purpose, he's ill].
- My mother went to the hospital to visit my aunt [normal noun, I'm thinking of a particular hospital that the listener knows, so

I use the].

jail / prison

- His father is in Ø jail [intended purpose].
- Her new house is near a jail [normal noun].

school

- John's at Ø school at the moment [intended purpose].
- There's a party at the school on Friday night [normal noun].

university

- She's studying Spanish at Ø university [intended purpose].
- The comedian hates performing at Ø universities [normal noun; I use 'no article' because I'm talking about universities in general].

* Here, I'm talking about a physical classroom. The word class is also used to mean a certain group of students, in which case it's a normal noun.

Bed is a strange word! If we don't use an article, it means a place where we sleep, not a particular object:



- The children are in Ø bed.
- We didn't get out of Ø bed until after one o'clock.
- She got home and went straight to Ø bed.

But when we are thinking about a bed as an object, we use articles in the normal way:

- She sat on the bed in my room [I choose the because the listener knows which bed I mean].
- I need to buy a new bed [I choose a because I don't know which bed yet, I'm not talking about a specific one].

The word home is also a bit strange. We usually use 'no article':

- They went Ø home.*
- I stayed at Ø home.
- Julie works from Ø home.
- Lucy is at Ø home at the moment.

*Notice we don't need to with 'go home' (not 'go to home').

But we can use an article with home when it means 'the building that somebody lives (or used to live) in'.

In this case we use articles in the normal way:

- We visited the home of Jackie Kennedy.
- My sister has made her flat into a beautiful home.
- [It's also possible to use 'home' as short for 'retirement home' or similar expression. We use articles in the normal way:
- Her grandmother is too frail to stay in her own house, so she lives in a (retirement) home.]

When we think about work as a place, then we don't need to use an article with it:

- She's at Ø work.



- I arrive at Ø work at nine.
- We leave Ø work every day at six.
- You should go to Ø work earlier.

We usually don't use a/an with work. We can sometimes use the if we are talking about some specific work that the listener knows about.

- The work I'm doing at the moment is very interesting.

[An exception is when work means work of art / literature / music. In this case work is a normal countable noun.]

When we are thinking about the town centre near to us, we often use 'no article' with certain expressions:

- In Ø town
- John's in Ø town at the moment.
- Go into Ø town
- Shall we go into Ø town this afternoon?
- Leave Ø town
- He left Ø town after he argued with his wife.

Of course, town can also be a normal noun:

- The town where I live is quite small [we use the because the listener knows which one].