



## Day 13 Explanation

We already saw that it's possible to use a/an + singular countable noun to talk about one member of a group or category. We can use this member as a way of generalising about the whole category. It's as if we take one member as an example. Anything which is true for this member is true for the whole group:

A child needs love.

This really means the same as when we use 'no article' + plural or uncountable noun to generalise about all the members of a group or category:

Ø Children need love.

In both these cases we are talking about children in general.

It's also possible to use a/an + singular countable noun to talk about any member of a group or category. This time, we're not generalising about the whole group, but instead saying that it doesn't matter or we don't know which one (or ones) we are talking about. If we use 'no article' + plural or uncountable noun then we mean a certain amount of the members of the category:

I need a cup of coffee.

In this case, I'm not generalising about cups of coffee. Instead, I'm saying that I need one cup and it doesn't matter which one. Any cup of coffee is good! In this case, when we make the noun plural, it doesn't mean the whole category. Instead, it means 'some' or 'a certain number':

We all need Ø cups of coffee.

The same thing is true when we use an uncountable noun. We're talking about 'some' or 'a certain amount':

Could you buy Ø milk?



We studied using the when both the speaker and the listener know which particular thing or set of things is being talked about, and using a/an or ‘no article’ when the speaker knows which one(s) but the listener doesn’t.

However, sometimes neither the speaker nor the listener knows which specific noun is being talked about. Instead, the speaker is talking about any member of a certain group or category. It’s not important to know exactly which member. We still use a/an (for singular countable nouns) or ‘no article’ (for plural or uncountable nouns), because the listener doesn’t know which one(s). For example, with a/an:

- I’d like a cup of tea. [The speaker doesn’t know which one, neither does the listener. It doesn’t matter which particular cup of tea.]
- I need to see a doctor. [Any doctor; neither the listener nor the speaker is thinking about a particular doctor.]
- Could you pass me a pen please? [Any pen, the speaker doesn’t know which one.]

And with ‘no article’:

- I’d like Ø chips.
- Could you buy Ø milk later, please?
- Lucy’s job is looking after Ø children.

We use a/an and ‘no article’ in the same way with hypothetical things (that is, when we’re talking about the idea of something but we don’t know if it really exists). Again, the listener doesn’t know which one and neither does the speaker. They’re just imagining a situation. This is often the case with questions. As the listener doesn’t know which thing or group of things the speaker has in mind, we use a/an for singular countable nouns and ‘no article’ for uncountable nouns and plural nouns. For example:

- We need a secretary who speaks German and Italian. [I don’t know if this kind of secretary exists. Neither the speaker nor the listener know which particular secretary, so we use a.]
- Is there a tall girl in your class?
- She wants Ø new shoes.



We use a/an (for singular nouns) and ‘no article’ (for plural or uncountable nouns) when we’re using members of categories to describe or classify people or things:

- The film was a comedy.
- Sage is a herb.
- His laptop is a PC.
- She’s a lovely girl.
- ‘What are these?’ ‘They’re Ø cakes’.
- John and Lucy are Ø lively children.
- Oxford and Bath are Ø cities in England.

This includes people’s jobs:

- Julie is a teacher [= she is part of the group which includes all teachers].
- John works as an accountant.
- I’m a student.

We don’t usually use ‘no article’ with singular nouns if they are jobs or professions (‘Julie is teacher’, ‘John works as accountant’, ‘I’m student’).

Again, if we want to use a plural noun, we need ‘no article’:

- John and Susan are Ø teachers.
- We are Ø accountants.

Here are some more examples using a/an with other categories of people. In this case, it’s religious, ethical and political beliefs:

- She’s a vegetarian [= she is a member of the group of vegetarians in the world].
- He’s a Muslim.



With a plural noun, we use ‘no article’:

- They are Ø socialists.
- Many European people are Ø Catholics.

We often use a/an with singular countable nouns when we describe something using a verb such as look like or sound like (or other verbs used for describing), or the preposition as:

- She looks like a dancer.
- He used his knife as a screwdriver.
- That sounds like a car outside.

With singular uncountable nouns or plural nouns we use ‘no article’:

- This coffee tastes like Ø mud.
- The boys in the choir sound like Ø angels.

Remember, we generally can’t use a singular countable noun alone (except in special situations, like after a sort of – see below), so we must use a/an in the following situations:

- He’s a teacher [not ‘He’s teacher’].
- The film is a drama [not ‘The film is drama’].
- He looks like an athlete [not ‘He looks like athlete’].

However, we don’t usually use an article (in UK English) after a kind of, a sort of, a type of or a variety of:

- He’s a sort of Ø journalist.
- Chai is a kind of Ø tea.
- Samba is a type of Ø music.



- Peppermint is a variety of Ø mint.

Be careful! An example of is NOT like this:

That's a good example of a correct sentence.

We often use exclamations to categorise something or someone. With what + singular countable nouns we need a/an. If the noun is uncountable or plural, we use 'no article'.

- What a/an + singular countable nouns:
  - What a beautiful day!
  - What a party!
  - What a horrible taste!
- What + plural or uncountable nouns:
  - What Ø terrible weather!
  - What Ø lovely shoes!
  - What Ø luck!