

A / an, the and zero article 1

A

We usually use **the** when we talk about –

Reminder → 11–19

★ things which are unique; that is, there is only one of them (or one set of them):

- ☐ **the world** **the sky** **the atmosphere** **the sun** **the ground**
the climate **the horizon** **the human race** **the environment**
the travel industry **the Internet**

★ general geographical areas with **the** as in:

- ☐ **the beach** **the town** **the sea(side)** **the land** **the country(side)**
 (where 'the country' or 'the countryside' means 'the area where there are no towns')

★ ☐ **the past** **the present** **the future**Note, however, that some nouns like this can be used with **zero article** (i.e. no article) to refer to a concept in general:

- ☐ **Climate** is one of the many factors involved in changing farming methods. (or **The climate** ...)
☐ These flowers grow best in sandy soil and **sun**. (= sunshine)
☐ In autumn the temperature difference between **land** and **sea** decreases. (or ... **the land** and **the sea** ...)

If we want to describe a particular instance of these we can use **a / an**. Compare:

- ☐ I could see the plane high up in **the sky**. and
☐ When I woke up there was **a bright blue sky**.
☐ What are your plans for **the future**? and
☐ She dreamt of **a future where she could spend more time painting**.

B

We can use **the** when we make generalisations about classes of things using singular countable nouns. (See also Unit 47A.) Compare the use of **the** and **a / an** in these sentences:

- ☐ **The computer** has revolutionised publishing. (this refers to computers in general) *but not*
 A computer has revolutionised publishing. (computers *in general* have done this, not an individual computer)
☐ **The computer** is an important research tool. and
☐ **A computer** is an important research tool. (this statement is true of both the general class and the individual item)

As an alternative to **the + singular countable noun** we can use a plural countable noun to talk about a class of things:

- ☐ **Computers** are an important research tool.

Note that if **the** is used with plural and uncountable nouns we refer to a specific thing or group:

- ☐ **The computers** have arrived. Where shall I put them?
☐ **The music** was wonderful. I could have listened to the orchestra all night.

When we define something or say what is typical of a particular class of people or things, we generally use **a / an** rather than **the**:

- ☐ **A corkscrew** is a gadget for getting corks out of bottles.
☐ **A garden** is there to give you pleasure, not to be a constant worry.

C

Some nouns can be used uncountably when we talk about the whole substance or idea, but countably when we talk about an instance or more than one instance of it. When these nouns are used countably we can use **a / an** (and plurals). Compare:

- ☐ I don't drink **coffee**. and ☐ Would you like **a coffee**? (= a cup of coffee)
☐ He shook with **fear**. and ☐ He has **a fear** of heights.

There are many other nouns like this, including **conversation, grammar, importance, iron, pleasure, shampoo, sound**. Some of these nouns (e.g. **grammar, iron**) have different meanings when they are used countably and uncountably.

45.1 Complete both sentences in each pair using one word from the box. Add **the** or **a / an** in an appropriate place. **A**

beach future past world

- 1 a I think the best Australian wine is as good as any in
b As a child, Dariya would often daydream about travelling forward in time to very different from the one she lived in.
- 2 a If we are elected, we will build our policies on the simple belief that our purpose is to create bright for our children rather than achieving short-term goals for ourselves.
b Although our current financial position is worrying, we have many new orders for our products and is looking very positive.
- 3 a As I get older, I remember better than things that happened recently.
b Many tourists come to the village looking for that never really existed.
- 4 a If you want to get away from it all, you can take a small boat to deserted on one of the islands.
b Dear Mum and Dad, We're having a great holiday. The weather's wonderful and we're spending most of our time on

45.2 Underline the correct or more likely answer. If both answers are possible, underline them both.

B

- 1 We get some strange requests in our shop. We had *the customer / a customer* in the other day who wanted to buy chocolate-covered ants.
- 2 It often seems that *the individual / an individual* can have little impact on government policy.
- 3 The invention of *a car / the car* is normally attributed to the German engineer Gottlieb Daimler.
- 4 *The television / A television* has changed the way we think more than any other modern invention.
- 5 The campaign against smoking in public places argues that its harmful effects are not confined to *the smoker / a smoker*.

45.3 Complete the sentences using the nouns from the box. Use each noun twice. If necessary, insert **a / an** in the correct place. **C**

conversation grammar iron pleasure sound

- 1 My sisters were clearly having ^a serious conversation so I didn't like to disturb them.
- 2 It now gives me great to introduce that marvellous ventriloquist, Marco Lutman.
- 3 As we walked through the rainforest we heard we weren't expecting – the ring of a mobile phone.
- 4 The failure to teach in schools has affected people's ability to write well.
- 5 Most red meat is relatively high in
- 6 travels at different speeds, depending on the temperature of the air.
- 7 It's real to travel by rail in Sweden. The trains are clean and punctual.
- 8 I have of English printed in 1890 on very thin paper.
- 9 Although he's got he never seems to use it. His shirts are always creased.
- 10 As she walked into the party, ceased and everyone in the crowded room stared at her.



A / an, the and zero article 2

A

We use **a / an** to say what a person's job is, was, or will be:

Reminder → 11–19

- ☐ She was **a company director** when she retired.
- ☐ Against her parents' wishes, she wants to be **a journalist**.

However, when we give a person's job title, or their unique position, we use **the** or **zero article** (i.e. no article), not **a / an**. Compare:

- ☐ She's been appointed **(the) head of the company**. *and*
- ☐ I'm **a production manager** at Fino. (= there may be more than one production manager)

After **the position of**, **the post of**, or **the role of** we use **zero article** before a job title:

- ☐ Dr Simons has taken on **the position of** Head of Department.

B

We usually use **zero article** (i.e. no article) before the name of an individual person or place. However, we use **the** –

☆ when there are two people with the same name to specify which one we mean:

- ☐ That's not **the Stephen Fraser** I went to school with.

but compare 'There was a Stephen Fraser in my class.' (= a person named Stephen Fraser)

☆ when we want to emphasise that the person we are referring to is the most famous person with that name. Used this way, **the** is stressed and pronounced /ði:/:

- ☐ Do they mean **the Neil Armstrong**, or someone else?

☆ with an adjective to describe a person, or another noun which tells us their job:

- ☐ **the late Michael Jackson**
- ☐ **(the) artist Joseph Turner** ('the' is sometimes left out, particularly in journalism)

☆ when we talk about a family as a whole:

- ☐ **The Robinsons** are away this weekend.

C

Note that **a / an**, or sometimes **zero article**, is used with a name when referring to the particular excellent qualities of the person named:

- ☐ Majid plays tennis well, but he'll never be **(a) Roger Federer**.

We also use **a / an** when we refer to an individual example of a product made by a particular manufacturer (e.g. I've just bought **a Mercedes**) or a work by a particular artist (e.g. Do you think it could be **a Van Gogh / a Rembrandt?**).

You can use **a / an** before a person's name if you don't know the person yourself. Compare:

- ☐ Dr Lee is here for you. (= I know Dr Lee) *and*
- ☐ There's **a Dr Amy Lee** on the phone. (= I haven't heard of her before) Do you want to talk to her?

D

In stories and jokes in conversation, **this** is commonly used instead of **a / an** to introduce a new person or thing. Using **this** highlights the person or thing as the topic of what is to come next:

- ☐ As I was walking along, **this spider** (= a spider) landed on my head, and ...
- ☐ **This man** (= a man) goes into a chemist and he says ...

E

We use **the** before a *superlative adjective* (**the biggest**, **the most expensive**, etc.) when the superlative adjective is followed by a noun or defining phrase:

- ☐ He is **the finest young player** around at the moment.

However, we can often leave out **the**, particularly in an informal style, when there is no noun or defining phrase after the superlative adjective. Compare:

- ☐ A: Why did you decide to stay in this hotel?
B: It was **(the) cheapest**. *and* It was **the cheapest** I could find.

46.1

- 46.2

- 46.3

- 46.4



A

We can use a pattern with **it** as the object of a verb where **it** refers forward to a clause. **It** can sometimes be followed directly by a **that**-, **if**- or **when**-clause after **can't bear**, **hate**, **like**, **love**, **resent** and **can't stand**, and by an **if**- or **when**-clause after **dislike**, **enjoy**, **prefer** and **understand**:

- ☐ I **hate it that** you can swim so well and I can't. (*not* I hate that you can swim ...)
- ☐ We always **enjoy it when** they stay with us. (*not* We always enjoy when they ...)

Some verbs can be followed by **it** and a **that**-clause, particularly in spoken English, or directly by a **that**-clause without **it**:

- ☐ You've just got to **accept (it) that** Emil's gone and won't be coming back.

Also: **admit**, **deny**, **guarantee**, **mention**

Many other verbs that can be followed by a **that**-clause or **wh**-clause are not used with **it** in this way:

- ☐ I can't **remember when** I last saw her. (*not* ... remember it when ...)

Also: **argue**, **discover**, **emphasise**, **notice**, **predict**

B

With other verbs used to indicate how we see a particular event or situation, **it** is followed first by an adjective or noun phrase and then a **that**-clause, **to**-infinitive clause, or clause beginning **when**:

- ☐ Officials said they **believe it unlikely that** any lasting damage to the environment has been done. (*or* ... they **believe it is unlikely that** ...; *not* ... they believe unlikely that ...)

Also: **consider**, **feel**, **find** (= discover something from experience), **think**

When we use **leave** and **owe** (= have a responsibility to) with **it** we can use **to somebody + to**-infinitive after **it**:

- ☐ Don't bother to arrange anything. Just **leave it to me to sort out**.
- ☐ She **owed it to her parents to do** well at college.

C

With the verbs **accept**, **regard**, **see**, **take** (= interpret something in a particular way), or **view** we use **it + as + noun (or adjective) + clause**:

- ☐ We **see it as an insult to have received no reply to our letter**.
- ☐ I **take it as encouraging when students attend all my lectures**.

D

It is / was no ... vs There is / was no ...

Here are some common expressions including **It is / was no ...** and **There is / was no ...**:

- ☐ **It's no secret** that he wants a new job.
- ☐ **It's no surprise** that his latest film has been so successful.
- ☐ **It's no use** telling me now. I needed to know a week ago.
- ☐ **It's no good** getting angry. That won't help solve the problem.
- ☐ **It's no coincidence (or accident)** that they left the party at the same time.
- ☐ **It's no longer** necessary to have a visa to visit the country.

- ☐ **There's no denying** that he's intelligent.
- ☐ I'm afraid **there's no alternative (or choice)** but to ask her to leave.
- ☐ **There's no hope** of getting more money.
- ☐ **There's no need** to explain how it works; I'll read the manual.
- ☐ **There's no point** in buying an ice-cream maker unless you plan to use it a lot.
- ☐ **There's no question** of agreeing to his demands.
- ☐ **There's no reason** to be pessimistic.
- ☐ **There's no chance** of finding a cure if we don't fund more research.

The sentences with **It is / was no ...** have alternatives in which the **that**-, **-ing** or **to**-infinitive clause is placed at the front, but the sentences with **There is / was no ...** do not. Compare:

- ☐ **It's no secret** that he wants a new job. (*or* That he wants a new job is no secret.) *and*
- ☐ **There's no denying** that he's intelligent. (*but not* That he's intelligent is no denying.)

97.1 Complete each sentence with an appropriate form of a verb from the box. If necessary, add it.

A & B

can't bear consider discover enjoy find
leave owe predict prefer remember

- 1 She can't bear it when people criticise her work, and she gets very upset.
- 2 I _____ hard to understand why the film was made in black and white and not colour.
- 3 If you _____ that you can't get to the meeting on the 16th I'll try to rearrange it.
- 4 We _____ to our supporters to play to the best of our ability in the match.
- 5 I _____ that the camera was on the table when I left the house.
- 6 I really _____ when the weather's hot like this. I'd hate to live in a cold climate.
- 7 I can't stop you dismantling your motorbike in the kitchen, but I'd _____ if you didn't.
- 8 I think we should _____ to the children to do the washing up.
- 9 I _____ that Randa will withdraw from the course within a month.
- 10 I _____ a privilege to have known Mark Jennings.

97.2 Here are some notes a managing director made for his first speech to the board of directors. In the speech he expanded the notes beginning **I + (verb) + it as ...**, using the verbs in brackets. Write what he said. **C**

- 1 _____ (take)
great honour - asked to become - managing director - Rexco
I take it as a great honour to be asked to become managing director of Rexco.
- 2 _____ (see)
part of my role - significantly reduce Rexco's carbon footprint - next 5 years
I see it as part of my role to significantly reduce Rexco's carbon footprint over the next 5 years.
- 3 _____ (accept)
necessary evil - some people - may redundant - in next year
I accept it as a necessary evil that some people may be made redundant in the next year.
- 4 _____ (view)
important for relations with workforce - make available information - managers' salaries
I view it as important for relations with the workforce that we make available information on managers' salaries.
- 5 _____ (regard)
unacceptable - modern company - exclude workforce - major decision-making
I regard it as unacceptable for a modern company to exclude the workforce from major decision-making.
- 6 _____ (take)
fundamental principle of company - suppliers of raw materials - given fair price for products
I take it as a fundamental principle of the company that we pay suppliers of raw materials a fair price for their products.

97.3 Complete the sentences with an appropriate **it ...** or **there ...** phrase from section D opposite. Suggest alternatives where possible. **D**

- 1 It's no coincidence that Karlsbad has won the ice hockey tournament for the last three years. It is a very rich club and its training facilities are excellent.
- 2 My contact lens must have fallen out in the snow, so _____ of finding it.
- 3 _____ that Julia and Jakub have split up. Everyone in the office knows.
- 4 I know your exam result wasn't good, but _____ getting depressed about it.
- 5 Your broken arm will take some time to mend, but _____ why you shouldn't be playing tennis again by the summer.
- 6 As the car ferry isn't running because of the high winds, _____ but to drive 100 kilometres around the lake.
- 7 _____ possible to buy tickets at the theatre. You have to buy them online.
- 8 Bungee jumping might be dangerous, but _____ that it's very exciting.

Focusing: **it-clauses** and **what-clauses****A** Focusing with **it-clauses**

We can use an **it-clause** with **be** to focus attention on the information that immediately follows **it + (be)**. A sentence like this is sometimes called a *cleft sentence*. The clause after the **it-clause** (usually a **that-clause**) contains information that is already known or considered to be less important:

- ☐ 'Lea bought the car from Olav.' 'No, **it was Olav** *that* bought the car from Lea.'
- ☐ I don't mind her criticising me, but **it's how she does it** *that* I object to.
- ☐ **It was to show how much I cared for her** *that* I bought her the necklace.

We sometimes use **which** or **who** instead of **that**; **when** and **where** can also be used, but usually only in informal English; and note that **how** or **why** can't replace **that**:

- ☐ Karl was always there to help her, and **it was to him** *that / who* she now turned for support.
- ☐ 'Ida's seriously ill in hospital.' 'But **it was only last Sunday** *when / that* I was playing tennis with her.'
- ☐ **It was in Warsaw** *where / that* the film was made.
- ☐ 'Was it by cutting staff that he managed to save the firm?' 'No, **it was by improving distribution** *that* he made it profitable.' (*not ... how he made it profitable.*)

B Focusing with **what-clauses**

We can also use a **what-clause** followed by **be** to focus attention on certain information in a sentence (= another form of *cleft sentence*). This pattern is particularly common in conversation. The information we want to focus attention on is outside the **what-clause**. Compare:

- ☐ We gave them some home-made cake. *and*
- ☐ **What we gave them** *was* some home-made cake.

We often do this if we want to introduce a new topic; to give a reason, instruction or explanation; or to correct something that has been said or done. In the following examples, the information in focus is in *italics*:

- ☐ **What I'd like you to work on is** *the revision exercise on the website.*
- ☐ Isa arrived two hours late: **what had happened was** *that his bicycle chain had broken.*
- ☐ 'We've only got this small bookcase – will that do?' 'No, **what I was looking for was** *something much bigger and stronger.'*

We can often put the **what-clause** either at the beginning or the end of the sentence:

- ☐ **What upset me most was** *his rudeness.* *or*
- ☐ *His rudeness was* **what upset me most.**

To focus attention on an *action* performed by someone, we use a sentence with **what + subject + do + be + to-infinitive** clause. We can't use an **it-clause** to do this (see A):

- ☐ Luis lost his job and was short of money, so **what he did was (to) sell** his flat and move in with his brother. (*not ... so it was (to) sell his flat that he did.*)

C The pattern in B is only usually used with **what-clauses**. Instead of placing other **wh-clauses** (beginning **how**, **when**, **where**, **who**, **why**) at the beginning of the sentence we prefer to use a noun which has a meaning related to the **wh-word** (e.g. **reason** rather than **why**; **place** rather than **where**) followed by a **that-** or **wh-clause**. Here are some examples:

- ☐ **The only reason (why / that)** I left the party early was that I was feeling unwell. (*rather than Why I left the party early was ...*)
- ☐ **The place (where / that)** you should play football is the playground, not the classroom.
- ☐ **Somebody (who / that)** I enjoy reading is Peter Carey.
- ☐ **The time (when / that)** I work best is early morning.

98.1 Complete the rewritten sentences to focus attention on the underlined information. Start with **it + be** and use an appropriate **wh-word** or **that**. **A**

- 1 Mark's known for ages that his parents are coming to stay with us this weekend, but he only told me yesterday. *Mark's known for ages that his parents are coming to stay with us this weekend, but ... it was only yesterday that / when he told me.*
- 2 Helena has been feeling a bit depressed for some time, so I booked a holiday in Amsterdam to cheer her up. *Helena has been feeling a bit depressed for some time, so ...*
- 3 It's not that I don't want to have dinner with you tonight; I can't come because I've got so much work to do. *It's not that I don't want to have dinner with you tonight; ...*
- 4 I had my wallet when I went into the sports hall, so I lost it somewhere in there. *I had my wallet when I went into the sports hall, so ...*
- 5 She doesn't find learning languages very easy, and she improved her Spanish only by studying very hard. *She doesn't find learning languages very easy, and ...*
- 6 I have had a great deal of help from my parents and two brothers in my research, and I dedicate this thesis to my family. *I have had a great deal of help from my parents and two brothers in doing my research, and ...*

98.2 Write B's responses beginning **No, what ...**, correcting what was said in A's question. Use the notes in brackets. **B**

- 1 A: Did you say that Rudi was going to live in Austria? (*holiday / Austria*)
B: *No, what I said was that he was going on holiday to Austria.*
- 2 A: Do you hope to sell your Picasso paintings? (*be put into / public art gallery*)
B:
- 3 A: Did it annoy you that Carla came so late? (*not apologise*)
B:
- 4 A: Did you mean to give Ella your bike? (*could borrow it / until needed again*)
B:

Now give similar responses which focus on the action.

- 5 A: Did you watch the football on TV last night? (*get brother / record it / watch tonight*)
B: *No, what I did was (to) get my brother to record it and I'll watch it tonight.*
- 6 A: This steak tastes delicious. Did you fry it? (*put oil and soy sauce on / grill*)
B:
- 7 A: Did you buy Megan the coat she wanted? (*give / money towards it*)
B:
- 8 A: Did you fly from Sydney to Brisbane. (*hire a car / drive all the way*)
B:

98.3 Complete B's responses using one of the phrases from section C opposite and the information in brackets. Put the information in the right order and add an appropriate form of **be**. **C**

- 1 A: I suppose Paul got the job because of his qualifications. (*uncle owns company*)
B: *Well, actually, I think ... the reason why / that Paul got the job was that his uncle owns the company.*
- 2 A: Do you know anyone who could mend my computer? (*might be able / help / Petra*)
B: *I don't know if she's free, but*
- 3 A: You grew up in this village, didn't you? (*between this village and next*)
B: *In fact*
- 4 A: In what period of your life do you think you were happiest? (*lived Australia*)
B: *I suppose*