The Article System:
Understanding the usage of *a, an,* and *the*

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The articles *a/an* and the (and sometimes ϕ, called the zero article) are a particularly difficult area in ESL/EFL. Proper usage depends on various factors regarding the noun to be modified, including number, definiteness, and specificity. The complexity of the article system is especially problematic for students who do not have articles in their native languages. Some of these students freeze up, letting the question of which article they should use block their attempts at communicating. Others decide they will never learn articles correctly, so they resist internalizing proper usage. Teachers often do little to help. Many teachers only understand article usage as what sounds right to them and are at a loss to explain anything beyond each particular situation. No matter how good their intuitive grasp of the article system, these teachers run the risk of making articles appear not learnable.

The purpose of this paper is to help teachers generally understand how noun type and context systematically affect article usage. The first three sections outline and explain underlying principles of article usage. Moreover, usage charts in *Section 4 below* help to summarize the information. Special usage for making generalizations and teaching suggestions and references will be presented in a separate publication.

This paper consists of the following sections:
1. **Overview of the article system and basic usage rules**
2. **Types of nouns by class and number**
3. **How to know if a noun is definite or indefinite**
4. **Article Usage Charts**

1. Overview of the article system and basic usage rules

a) What are articles?

The indefinite article *a/an* and the definite article *the* can be viewed as part of the word class

called determiners, which limit or determine noun phrases. Within the class of determiners, they belong to the set of central determiners, which are mutually exclusive. Thus, *a/an* and *the* **cannot** be used with the following sets of words:

    1. Demonstratives- *this, that, these, those.*

    2. Possessives- *my, his, her, your, their, its*

    3. Some quantifiers- *some, each, every, no, any*

The: The definite article *the* refers to nouns that are clearly known to, or definite for both speaker and listener. Depending on context, *the* can be used with any common noun and many proper nouns.

A/An: The indefinite article *a/an* refers to singular, countable, common nouns. It cannot be used with plural or uncountable nouns. Although *a* and *an* have the same meaning, *a* is used preceding words that begin with vowel sounds (*an ear, an interesting story, an apple*) while *an* is used preceding words with consonant sounds (*a car, a tooth, a house, a unicorn, a year*). Usage may vary for words with a pronounced *h* in an unstressed first syllable: *a/an historian.* (Macarthur, 1992)

b) Three basic questions for article usage

Basic article usage depends on three questions, discussed later in greater detail:

1) What type of noun is being modified?

    a) Pronouns (I, you, we, etc.) use *no article.*

    b) Singular proper nouns (Jim, Mt. Fuji) usually use *no article.*

    c) Plural proper nouns (The Clintons, The Great Lakes) usually use *the.*

    d) Singular countable nouns can use *a, an,* or *the.*

    e) Plural countable nouns can use *the,* no article, or *some.*

    f) Uncountable nouns (sugar, happiness) can use *the,* no article, or *some.*

2) Is the noun definite or indefinite?

    A noun is definite when it is clearly known to both the speaker and the listener. Depending on noun type, definite nouns either take *the* or no article, while indefinite nouns take *a, an,* no article, or *some.*

3) Does the noun refer to a general group?

    Articles have special usage for making statements about things or people as a class.

    Uncountable nouns carry no article in generalizations: *Blood is red.*

    Countable nouns can be generalized in the plural or the singular, often as follows:

      Dogs are friendly animals.   *A dog is a friendly animal.*

2. Classes of nouns by type and number

a) Pronouns- not used with articles

Definite pronouns are never used with articles. Nor are articles normally used with indefinite pronouns. Note that all of these indefinite pronouns begin with the determiners *some, any, no,* and *ever*. EXCEPTION: The indefinite pronouns are sometimes used with articles in the sense of *a particular case of*, for example : *He is a nobody.   She has a certain something.*

b) Proper nouns- usually take no article if singular and take *the* if plural

Proper nouns, among other categories, include personal names and geographical names. Proper nouns are inherently definite and the following two rules generally apply to them:

i) Singular proper nouns usually carry no article:

Single personal names: Bob Jones, Bubba, TinTin, Mary

Continents: Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North/ South America

Most Countries: Japan, Sweden, France, England, China States, provinces, or prefectures: California, Saskatchewan, Kanagawa

Cities: Chicago, Tokyo, Paris (The Hague is an exception)

Single Lakes: Lake Baikal, Lake Michigan, Lake Tanganyika

Single Islands: Honshu, Oahu, Easter Island, Java

Single Mountains: Mt. Fuji, Mt. Kinabalu, Mt. Whitney

Streets: Fifth Avenue, Columbus Street, Maple Drive

Important Places in a city or region: City Hall, Central Park

ii)   Plural proper nouns usually carry *the*

Plural personal names: The Andersons, The Clintons, The Beatles

Countries when viewed as federations: The U.S.A, The U.K.

Groups of Lakes: The Great Lakes, The Finger Lakes

Groups of Islands: The Azores, The Canary Islands, The Greater Antilles

Groups of Mountains: The Andes, The Himalayas, The Rockies

iii) EXCEPTIONS to usual article usage with proper nouns:

Oceans and Seas use *the*: The Pacific Ocean, The Sea of Japan

Rivers use *the*: The Nile, The Mississippi, The Amazon

Museums and Galleries use *the* : The Louvre, The Prado

Hotels use *the*: The Hyatt, The Ritz, The Holiday Inn

Monuments use *the*: The Great Wall of China, The Taj Mahal

Personal names used in the sense of *a person/persons of the name X*:

The Nancy that I know isn't tall.   I met a Tim at the party.

There are six Marys in my class. Do you know any Tims?

Names of nations of people and some other social groups:

These types of group affiliations behave differently than standard pronouns and they are very flexible in their usage. For example, all of the following are acceptable, although the meaning may vary slightly: *the/a / φ some Japanese, the/ φ /some Americans, the/an American.*

c)　Singular & Plural common nouns and Uncountable nouns

The article system depends on number at the most basic level. For example, *a* and *an* carry the idea of *one*. Accordingly, *a* and *an* can only be used with singular, countable nouns. Plural nouns like *men* and *chairs* are never used with *a* or *an*. Nouns like *gold*, *helium*, and *sand,* which are almost always uncountable in English, are never used with 'a' or 'an' in their uncountable sense. This is a special problem for students whose languages do not often distinguish between singular and plural nouns.

Number and article usage (for common nouns, not proper nouns):

1. **Most nouns in English are countable.**
2. *A* and *an* **mean** *one*, **so they are used** <u>only with</u> **singular, countable nouns.**
   a man, an apple, but NOT *a men, an apples, or a gold.*
3. **Singular, countable common nouns use** *a, an*, **or** *the*. *I want* <u>*an apple*</u> *or*
   I want <u>*the apple*</u>, but NOT *I want* <u>*φ apple*</u>.
4. **Plural countable common nouns use** *some, the*, **or** *no article*, (NOT *a/an*).
   I want <u>*some/ φ apples*</u>. *or I want* <u>*the apples*</u>, but NOT *I want* <u>*an apples*</u>.
5. **Uncountable nouns also start with** *some, the*, **or** *no article*, (NOT *a/an*).
   There is <u>*some sand*</u> *in my bathing suit*, or <u>*The sand*</u> *in the Caribbean is white*, or <u>*The beach is made of φ sand*</u>, but NOT *There is* <u>*a sand*</u> *in my bathing suit.*

Countability: Most nouns in English are countable. Note the following expressions: *I need five chairs. I saw a man. There are many fish in the sea. I had a few sausages.* For countable nouns, article usage varies to correspond with singular or plural number. Moreover, although most nouns are countable, many frequently used nouns carry no reference to number. These nouns also have separate rules for article usage, although usage often resembles that of plural countable nouns.

(1)　Singular Countable Nouns

These nouns consist of one complete item, for example, one car, one house, one person, one airplane. Singular common nouns take the following articles:

1. *The : the person I saw, the airplane over there*
2. *An* if the next word in the noun phrase begins with a vowel sound:
   an interesting person, an airplane
3. *A* if the next word in the noun phrase begins with a consonant sound
   a person, a big airplane

(2) Plural Countable Nouns

These nouns consist of more than one complete, countable item (*two cars, three houses, two airplanes*).   Plural nouns can have the, some or no article:

The:	The apartments in this neighborhood are small.
Some:	I looked at some apartments yesterday.
No article:	φ Apartments are cheaper than houses. Those are φ apartments.

(3) Uncountable nouns (also known as *noncount* or *mass* nouns)

A major complication to the idea of singular/plural cases for nouns is that many highly-used nouns are not countable. In other words, they have no marker distinguishing between singular and plural. Although the best way to be sure whether a particular noun is uncountable is to have previously memorized it as uncountable, some central ideas and categories apply to uncountable nouns. They usually involve things which are being thought of as a group of many smaller components, a divisible mass, or as something very different from everyday, tangible objects (for example, abstractions or activities). Since they are not countable, these sort of nouns do not take the determiners *a/an*, *a few, several,* or *one, two, three, etc.* Article usage for uncountable nouns resembles that for plural common nouns, although it is not the same:

The:	The sugar in that store is old.
Some:	I drank some milk yesterday.
No article:	φ Gold is expensive. That φ gold.

(a) Concrete uncountable nouns

As the name '*mass nouns*' implies, many uncountable nouns include the idea of many parts of a whole considered together. This idea can apply across the board from groups of large items, to portionable masses, groups of small, uniform particles, whether they be solids or fluids. Some examples are:

Groups of similar items: *garbage, furniture, postage, traffic, jewelry, fruit*

Groups of small, uniform particles: *fluids, solids and semi-solids, gases*

(b) Other uncountable nouns

Most other uncountables are things which are difficult to count because they are not tangible objects

or at least are very different from everyday objects like books or chairs. The following are some examples (Azar, 1992):

> **Abstract nouns** - *beauty, health, truth, progress, hatred, etc.*
>
> **Activities** - *eating, swimming, sleeping,* and other gerunds.
>
> **Recreation** - *baseball, soccer, poker, chess, etc.*
>
> **Languages** - *Arabic, Chinese, English, etc.*
>
> **Fields of study** - *chemistry, engineering, mathematics, etc.*
>
> **Natural Phenomena** - *weather, dew, fog, wind, darkness, fire, gravity, etc.*

(c) Nouns shifting from uncountable to countable

Of course, even uncountable nouns can be quantified. This usually occurs in two general ways. When concrete masses or natural phenomena are described, quantification usually takes the form of measure words (portions, pieces, scientific units etc.) For more abstract nouns, or those referring to activities, quantification usually takes the form of referring to a particular instance of that phenomenon (*Five lives were saved.*) Below are some examples:

1. **number of portions or servings** - *a (glass of) beer, two slices of bread*
2. **constituent pieces of** - *a piece of furniture, a drop of rain, a grain of sand*
3. **containers** - *a box of soap, a can of soda, a bundle of wood*
4. **quantified in terms volume, mass, weight, or other scaled measure-**
    two liters of gasoline, a cup of rice, 10 centimeters of rain
5. **specific kinds or types of** - *I like spicy <u>cheeses</u>. This is <u>a California wine</u>.*
6. **a particular instance of a phenomenon or activity-**
    A cat has <u>nine lives</u>.   Shoplifting is <u>a crime</u>.   She is <u>a real beauty</u>.

3. Definite and indefinite nouns

The fact that *the* is named the *definite article* and *a/an* is named the *indefinite article* reflects the importance of the idea of definiteness and indefiniteness to article usage. Whether a noun is indefinite or definite depends on the context in which it is being expressed. Since all common nouns use *the* with the definite case, this paper will begin there.

a) Definite nouns- when to use *the*

In general, whether a noun is definite or not depends on the point of view of both the listener and the speaker, or more precisely, what the speaker *assumes* their points of view are.

If the listener can still ask,"*Which* one?" the speaker should not have used *the*.

For example, at a basketball game a player screams to his friend, "*Give me <u>the ball</u>.*" The player obviously is referring to the ball that is being used in the game. *Which* ball is perfectly clear to

him and his friend, so it is appropriate to use *the*. On the other hand, if the same man went into a sporting goods store to buy a basketball, he would probably say, "*I would like to buy a basket-ball*." It would be strange for him to say <u>*the basketball*</u> unless he were sure that the cashier knew exactly *which* basketball he was talking about. Of course, if they had talked about which basketball he wanted to buy in a prior conversation, or if he were pointing at a basketball while he was talking, <u>*the basketball*</u> would make sense.

The basic idea of definiteness is that either the non-verbal context or the words should make it clear to *both* the speaker *and* the listener *which* thing the speaker is talking about. On the next two pages are nine common contexts for using *the*, adapted from a similar list of contexts (Brown, 1973). In all cases, the verbal or non-verbal context answers the question *Which one?* for the speaker *and* the listener.

Nine Common Contexts for using *the*

1. Nouns that are definite for everyone

The moon, the earth, the sun, the solar system, the stars

We all share a setting where these things are definite (planet earth).

Note that **proper nouns are exceptions**. They are definite for everyone.

2. Things that are definite or obviously unique within a shared setting

In a room :   *Turn off <u>the lights</u>. Close <u>the door.</u>*

In a car :   *I think you left <u>the emergency brake</u> on.*

While sitting at a table eating lunch : *Can you pass <u>the salt</u>?* I like <u>*the potatoes*</u>.

In all of the above situations, the thing being talked about is an integral part of the immediate physical setting of the speaker and listener.

3. People or other entities that are definite within a social group

At school, between students: <u>*The teacher*</u> *is late. Let's go home.*

Between company employees: *Where's <u>the boss</u>?*

In all of the above situations, the people are talking about things or people, which, although they may not be present, are part of their shared social world. Note that the possessive pronouns *your, our, my* can often be used in the place of *the* in these types of statements. For examples, *"The teacher is late"* and *"Our teacher is late"* can mean the same thing.

4. Things that are definite because they are an integral part of a larger whole which is clearly the context of the conversation

My bicycle is fast, but <u>the paint</u> is ugly.　The house is nice.　<u>The garden</u> is beautiful.

5. Things that are definite because the speaker is pointing at them

By pointing, nodding at, or grabbing at, or otherwise physically identifying an object, the speaker can make it definite to the listener. Thus, even in a library, it is perfectly normal to point at a particular book and say, *"Can you hand me <u>the book</u>."*

6. Things that make themselves definite because of characteristics that draw attention

The earthquake was terrible, wasn't it?　The streaker was funny.

In these cases, *which* streaker and *which* earthquake are assumed to be definite to both speaker and listener because they both either have experienced them or heard about them already.

7. Things which are ordered or ranked in a set

Another way to make something definite is to specify its rank or order in a set.　Thus, superlatives (*slowest, biggest, most intelligent, etc.*) and ordinal numbers (*first, second, etc.*) usually go along with *the.*

He is <u>the tallest</u> person I know.　The Himalayas <u>are the tallest</u> mountains on earth.

It is <u>the last sentence</u> on the page.　　I live in <u>the second house</u> on the left-hand side.

However, note usages with cardinal numbers: *day two, chapter three, volume five.*

8. Things which are clearly defined in words

One way to make something definite is to describe its qualities:

I like <u>the director</u> who did Schindler's List and ET.　I like <u>the people</u> who work at my school.　<u>The man</u> in the green hat across the street is staring at you.

In the above situations, the nouns are made definite because they are described in a way that, from the speaker's and listener's points of view, set them apart from all other people or things.　Such nouns are often followed by adjective clauses.

9. Things that have already been mentioned in the conversation

In the course of a conversation or monologue, if a noun has already been mentioned once, it usually becomes a definite noun (*see Section 3, Part B, below*). *I have <u>a cat</u> and <u>a dog</u>.　<u>The cat's</u> name is George.*

Here, the first sentence introduces the existence of the cat, so by the second sentence, it is already clear which cat.

COMMON EXCEPTIONS

The following constructions don't fit into the above-described pattern of *the* usage.

Places with activities : *the store/doctor/bank /bathroom, ϕ school, ϕ church*

Some famous illnesses : *the mumps/measles/ flu/plague/chickenpox*

Some transport/media : *the train/bus, the telephone/Internet/radio, ϕ 10 television*

Predicate nominals, or Noun B, in the sentence A=B use are treated indefinitely, even though it may appear definite to both speaker and listener.

This is <u>a pencil</u>.   These are <u>ϕ pencils</u>.

One might think of them as a first mention (*see below*) defining an item not yet understood.

b) Indefinite Nouns

Indefinite nouns may be thought as things *not* already defined clearly to speaker and listener. As might be expected, this includes situations where they do not know *which one*? However, it also includes predicate nominals (*<u>a car</u>* in *It's <u>a car</u>.*), possibly because they answer the question *What is it?*. Finally, *first mention* of existence of an item is usually expressed indefinitely (*There is <u>a</u> <u>mosquito</u> in here.*)

When to use *a/an*, some, and no article:.

With <u>singular nouns, use *a/an*</u>. *A* is used if the following word begins with a vowel sound, *an* is used if the following word begins with a consonant sound:

I need <u>a car</u>.	indefinite (speaker does not have it yet)
	singular (one new car is needed) consonant sound
I saw <u>an old movie</u>.	indefinite (*which* movie is not yet clear to the listener)
	singular (one movie was seen), vowel sound

With <u>plural and uncountable nouns</u>, <u>some</u>* is common, but it is also all right to use <u>no article</u>.

My friend is taking care of <u>some cats</u>.	Indefinite (*which* is not clear to the listener)
	Plural (how many is not clear)
I want <u>ϕ cigarettes</u>.	Indefinite (speaker does not have them yet)

I put <u>some sugar</u> in your tea.

Plural (but how many is not clear)

Indefinite (*how much* is not clear to the listener)

Uncountable (sugar is uncountable)

*<u>One exception</u> to this is <u>predicate nominals</u>, which <u>do not use *some* in the plural</u>. They are described in detail in the following section.

i) **Which** **one is not yet understood, the flip side of the definite:**

One common use of the indefinite is with nouns which are not yet clearly defined or known for either the speaker, or the listener, or both. Here are some examples:

I ate <u>some/ φ ice cream</u> today.   <u>The listener does not know *which*</u> ice cream.

I saw <u>a dog</u> in your yard.

I saw <u>some/ φ dogs</u> in your yard.   <u>The listener does not know</u> *which* dog/s.

Lets go see <u>a movie</u>.

Lets rent <u>some/ φ movies</u>.   <u>The speaker and listener do not know</u> *which* movie/s.

ii) **Predicate nominals,** *a man in I am <u>a man</u>.*)

Noun B (man) in the sentence A = B (I am <u>a man</u>.) is usually treated as indefinite.

These types of nouns, called *predicate nominals,* classify or identify the subject noun. They may not seem indefinite because they have already been identified as the topic of conversation. However, one might think of them being indefinite because they answer the question *"What is it?"* In other words, <u>they define something for the first time</u>. Importantly, plural predicate nouns do not take *some* (Celce-Muria, 1983):

It is <u>*a pen*</u>.   This is <u>*a big house*</u>.   I am <u>*a doctor*</u>.   This is <u>*φ* chalk.</u>

You are <u>φ students</u>.   NOT You are <u>*some students*</u>.

iii) First Mention － a few categories

If a noun is not already definite through context, it usually has to be introduced to the listener before it can be used with *the*. When it is being introduced or mentioned the first time, it is still indefinite, even if it is being described in detail. This type of usage is apparent in the following circumstances:

1.   Reporting information about something for the first time

I hear <u>a strange noise</u>.   <u>A man</u> just came out of the building.

Note the article change in the following dialogue:

A: Today I saw <u>*a little cat*</u> chasing a big black dog.

B: What did <u>*the cat*</u> look like?

2.   Ordering something, asking another person to choose out of a group, or offering something to somebody

Pick a card, any card.   *Here, have some coffee.*   *Would you like some soda?*

Here's a napkin for you.   *I'll take a coke.*

3.   Certain phrases commonly used to establish existence

There is...	There are...	Have (have got)
There is *a* big, red spider on your arm.	There are five people here	This computer has *a* good screen.
There is ϕ sugar in this tea.	There are a lot of cars here.	I have *a* brain
There was *some money* on the table.	There were ϕ cats in that house	I have got *a* terrible headache

All of the above phrases introduce a noun and emphasize its existence. Even if the speaker is pointing and describing something in clear sight to the listener, they usually take indefinite nouns.

c)   The natural move from indefinite to definite in a dialogue or monologue: second or later mention

After a noun has been introduced by its first mention, it usually becomes definite. This is easily observed in conversations.

A: <u>*An old man*</u> *and his son lived in this house before you did.*

B: *Did you know* <u>*the old man*</u> *very well?*

It is also apparent in monologues:

Think of <u>*a number.*</u> *Now tell me* <u>*the number.*</u>

I have <u>*a cat*</u> *and a dog. I like them both.*   <u>*The cat's*</u> *name is Sally.*

Notice that in many of these examples, a pronoun could be used in place of the noun.

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Section 4- Article Usage Chart

To determine article usage, link a *noun type* from the first column with a *context* from the other columns.

Basic noun type	Context one	Context two	Context three
NOUN TYPES Determine the context, (*right*) and match it with a noun type (*below*). *Pronouns, which use no article, are not included.*	**DEFINITE** It is perfectly clear to speaker and listener *Which thing* is being talked about.e.g., -Clear from context -Second or later mention -Described definitely in relation to other things	**INDEFINITE** 1-It is not perfectly clear to speaker and listener *Which thing* is being talked about ; or 2-First mention of existence *There is/There are, etc.;*or 3-Noun B in the sentence *A=B*. *They* are *pens.*(do not use some)	**GENERALIZATIONS** Statements referring to thing or people as a class. The noun is usually the subject of the sentence. *Groups of people as nations or political units, etc., can take many forms: Germans are/The Germans are/ A German is/The German is* + tall.
COUNTABLE, SINGULAR(1) cat, boy, house, (1) cup of sugar (1) piece of paper	**THE** Close *the door*, please. I saw a boy. *The boy* laughed. They live in *the second house* on the left.	**A/AN** I usually eat *an apple* for breakfast. There's *a spider* on your arm. This is *a dog*.	**A/AN** *A cat* is a good pet. **THE** *The elephant* has a trunk.(formalusage) Edison invented *the light bulb*.
COUNTABLE, PLURAL(>1) Cats, boys, houses, (>1) cups of sugar (>1) pieces of paper	**THE** Pass *the potatoes*, please. *The boys* next door are noisy. Where's *the cup of sugar* I put on the table?	**SOME/NO ARTICLE:** I saw*(some)dogs* in the yard. There are *(some)people* outside. They are *doctors.* **NOT* They are some doctors.	**NO ARTICLE, FREQUENT USAGE** *Cats* are not as friendly as dogs. *Elephants* have trunks. **THE** for some groups of people: *The poor* are always with us.
UNCOUNTABLES furniture, sugar, paper, happiness, darkness	**THE** Thank you for giving me *the furniture.*	**SOME/NO ARTICLE:** I need*(some)* coffee. Can you give me*(some)money?*	**NO ARTICLE** *Green tea* is good for you. *Water* is a liquid.
PROPER, SINGULAR(1) Jim Hall, New York	**NO ARTICLE** I saw *Jim*. (exceptions use *the*)	**RARE USAGE** I met *a Jim* yesterday. (meaning *a person named Jim*)	**RARE USAGE** *A Kennedy* always tries his best. (*see column head* for people as nations)
PROPER, PLURAL(>1) The Smiths, The Alps.	**THE** I like *the Dodgers*. (exceptions use no article)	**RARE USAGE** I met *one of the Smiths* yesterday. *Some of the Alps* are tall.	**THE** *The Himalayas* are very tall. (*see column head* for people as nations)

Article Usage Chart (Quick Reference)

To determine article usage, link a *noun type* from the first column with a *context* from the other columns.

Basic noun type	Context one	Context two	Context three
NOUN TYPES Determine context for noun (*right*)and match with a noun type (*below*) *Pronouns, which use no article are not included.*	**DEFINITE**	**INDEFINITE**	**GENERALIZATIONS**
COUNTABLE, SINGULAR(1)	**THE** I saw a boy. *The boy* laughed.	**A/AN** There's *a spider* on your arm.	**A/AN** *A cat* is a good pet. (The *formal usage)
COUNTABLE, PLURAL(>1)	**THE** *The boys* next door are noisy.	**SOME/NO ARTICLE.** There are*(some) people* outside	**NO ARTICLE *frequent usage** *Cats* are not as friendly as dogs. (THE for some groups of people)
UNCOUNTABLES	**THE** Thank you for giving me *the furniture.*	**SOME/NO ARTICLE** I need*(some)coffee.*	**NO ARTICLE** *Water* is a liquid.
PROPER, SINGULAR(1)	**NO ARTICLE** (usually) I saw *Jim*.	**RARE USAGE**	**RARE USAGE**
PROPER, PLURAL(>1)	**THE** (usually) I like *the Dodgers*.	**RARE USAGE**	**THE**

Simplifying the chart:

1) The definite case consistently uses the, except with singular proper nouns.

2) Countable, plural nouns and uncountable nouns have similar article usage across all three contexts.