

The Definite Article - *the*

You use **the** when you know that the listener knows or can work out what particular person/thing you are talking about.

For example:	The apple you ate was rotten.	Did you lock the car?
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You should also use **the** when you have already mentioned the thing you are talking about.

For example:	She's got two children; a girl and a boy. The girl's eight and the boy's fourteen.
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We use **the** to talk about geographical points on the globe.

For example:	the North Pole	the equator
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We use **the** to talk about rivers, oceans and seas

For example:	the Nile	the Pacific	the English channel
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We also use **the** before certain nouns when there is only one of a particular thing.

For example:	the rain	the sun	the world	the earth	the White House
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However if you want to describe a particular instance of these you should use a/an.

For example:	I could hear the wind. / There's a cold wind blowing. What are your plans for the future? / She has a promising future ahead of her.
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The is also used to say that a particular person or thing being mentioned is the best, most famous, etc. In this use, **the** is usually given strong pronunciation:

For example:	Harry's Bar is the place to go. You don't mean you met the Tony Blair, do you?
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Note! - **The** doesn't mean all:

For example:	The books are expensive. (Not all books are expensive, just the ones I'm talking about.) Books are expensive. (All books are expensive.)
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No Article

We usually use no article to talk about things in general:

For example:	Inflation is rising.	People are worried about rising crime. (Note! People generally, so no article)
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You do not use an article when talking about sports:

For example:	My son plays football .	Tennis is expensive to watch.
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You do not use an article before uncountable nouns when talking about them generally.

For example:	Information is important to any organisation.	Coffee is bad for you.
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You do not use an article before the names of countries except where they indicate multiple areas or contain the words "state(s)", "kingdom", "republic", "union". These words are nouns, so they need an article.

For example:	No article - Italy, Mexico, Bolivia, England Use the for - the UK (United Kingdom), the USA (United States of America), the Irish Republic And, for multiple areas such as the Netherlands, the Philippines, the British Isles.
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References and further reading:

Adapted from: Online English Grammar (2011) *Definite* article. Available at:
<http://www.edufind.com/english/grammar/Determiners2a.cfm> (Accessed: 22 Oct 2011).