

Determiners

Determiners are identifying or quantifying adjectives, which modify nouns and pronouns by describing, identifying, or quantifying them.

Some Basic Examples

The **red** Corvette ran off the road. [describes]

That Corvette needs to be repaired. [identifies]

We saw **several** Corvettes race by. [quantifies]

Common Determiners

- The articles *a/an*, *the*
- *This*, *these*, *that*, *those*
- *My*, *our*, *your*, *his*, *her*, *its*, *their*
- Possessive nouns and noun phrases (*Sheila's* paper, *my friend's* book)
- *Whose*, *which*, *what*
- *All*, *both*, *each*, *every*, *some*, *any*, *either*, *no*, *neither*, *many*, *much*, *(a) few*, *(a) little*, *several*, *enough*
- The numerals *one*, *two*, *etc.*

Some determiners, such as *a*, *an*, *this*, *that*, *one*, and *each*, can only be used with singular nouns; others, such as *these*, *those*, *all*, *both*, *many*, *several*, and *two*, can only be used with plural nouns. Still other determiners -- *my*, *the*, and *which*, for example -- can be used with singular or plural nouns.

Using *a* or *an*

Use *a* or *an*, indefinite articles, with singular count nouns. Use *a* before a consonant sound (*a car*) and *an* before a vowel sound (*an uncle*). Consider sound rather than spelling: *a house*, *an hour*. Do not use indefinite articles with plural count nouns or with noncount nouns.

Using *the*

The definite article *the* is used with both count and noncount nouns whose identity is already known or is about to be made known to readers.

Examples

Let's meet at *the* fountain in front of Dwinelle Hall.

Last Saturday, a fire that started in a restaurant spread to a nearby clothing store. *The* store was saved, although it suffered water damage.

She asked him to shut *the* door when he left her office.

Using the zero article

If a noun appears without *the*, *a*, or *an*, or any other determiner (even if it is preceded by other adjectives), it is said to have a zero article. With plural count nouns and noncount nouns, the zero article is used to make generalizations.

Examples

In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes.

It is sometimes possible to make general statements with *the* or *a/an* and singular count nouns.

A first-year student is confronted with many new experiences.

The first-year student is confronted with many new experiences.

Most descriptive adjectives have other forms that allow someone to make comparisons: small, smaller, smallest; foolish, more foolish, most foolish, less foolish, least foolish. Many words that function in some sentences as pronouns can function as identifying adjectives when they are followed by a noun.

Examples

That is a dangerous intersection. [pronoun]

That intersection is dangerous. [identifying adjective]

