

Word-classes in English for Veterinary Medicine

4. ARTICLES: forms, functions and usages

✧ **A/AN (indefinite article)**

We use *a* before nouns beginning with a consonant sound (*a* disease, *a* fish, *a* eukaryote, *a* university, *a* horse, *a* yowl), and *an* before nouns beginning with a vowel sound (*an* analysis, *an* elephant, *an* organization, *an* hour, *an* injury).

✧ **USES**

1) We use a/an to mean one:

I get over *a* hundred emails every day.

2) We use a/an when we mention a person or a thing for the first time:

I'm going for *an* interview at Baxter next week.

3) We use a/an when we talk about something but do not give specific information:

She has *a* doctorate in Physics from Berkeley.

We need to call *a* technician.

4) We use a/an with professions, to say what job someone does:

Anne is *a* veterinarian.

She is *a* lab assistant, and her partner is *a* veterinary surgeon.

5) We use a/an with measurement of time, weight, distance and speed:

We meet twice *a* week.

In 1850 steel cost \$0.25 *a* kilo.

We charge €200 *an*/per hour.

N.B.: WE DO NOT USE A/AN WITH UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS

✧ **THE (definite article)**

We pronounce /ðə/ before nouns beginning with a consonant sound (*the* disease, *the* fish, *the* eukaryote, *the* university, *the* horse, *the* yowl) and /ði/ before nouns beginning with a vowel sound (*the* analysis, *the* elephant, *the* organization, *the* hour, *the* injury).

✧ **USES**

1) We use *the* when it is clear which person or thing we are talking about. It is clear because the person or thing has been already mentioned:

We need a meeting. *The* meeting should cover the questions of cost and timing.

2) Or it is clear from the context:

The situation needs to be monitored carefully.

3) Or it is clear because there is only one:

I was speaking to *the* Chief Veterinary Officer.

4) We use *the* before adjectives to refer to a category of things or people:

the unemployed, *the* rich, *the* Portuguese

5) We use *the* for certain countries and institutions:

the United States, *the* United Kingdom, *the* Netherlands, *the* Czech Republic, *the* Philippines, *the* United Arab Emirates, *the* Switzerland, *the* former USSR;

the World Health Organization, *the* British Veterinary Association, *the* United Nations

6) We use *the* for oceans, seas, rivers, canals, deserts and mountain ranges:

the Atlantic Ocean, *the* Pacific, *the* Mediterranean, *the* Amazon, *the* Suez Canal, *the* Sahara, *the* Alps

7) We use *the* in superlative expressions:

the best quality

8) We use *the* when expressing centuries and decades:
the XXI century, *the* Eighteenth century, *the* 1960s

✧ **ZERO ARTICLES**

✧ **We do not use *a/an* or *the* with the following:**

names of people: Donald Trump, Alexander Fleming, Louis Pasteur

names of places: Paris, Wall Street, Penny Lane

subjects of study: physics, geography, chemistry

meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

means of transport: by train, by taxi

most countries and continents: Asia, Africa, Greece

certain places: at work, at home, at school, in hospital

languages: Arabic, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese

and also days, months, years, colours, festivities.

✧ **Talking about plural things or people in general:**

Workers and tourists in Hong Kong have made complaints about hotels, offices and shopping malls because of their "icy" air conditioning.

✧ **Before uncountable nouns used in a general sense:**

Flexible working saves time and money and increases productivity.

✧ **Before a noun + number:**

page 35, gate 14, size 7, platform 5