

Adapted from: Elementary Language Practice by Michael Vince

Explanations

Indefinite and definite

There was a book on the desk.

We do not have any information about this book. (indefinite)

Where's the book with the answers?

We know something about this book. (definite)

Indefinite article: a/an

- with general descriptions

A footballer is a person who plays football. An apple is a type of fruit.

- with a person's job

Mary is a doctor. I'm an engineer.

- with a person's character or status

Helen is a genius! Paul is a star!

Definite article: the

We use **the**:

- with unique objects and known references

The moon circles around the earth. (There is only one moon.)

The Tower of London is very old. (There is only one.)

I'm going to the shop. (We know which shop we are talking about.)

- with nationalities and other groups of people

The Spanish love dancing.

The Beatles were a famous pop group.

- with adjectives to describe groups of people

Jane has a job helping the poor.

The rich usually live in big houses.

The old need our help.

- with collective nouns

Call the police!

The government is very unpopular.

- with geographical features

Rivers the Loire, the Rhine

Oceans the Atlantic, the Pacific

Seas the Mediterranean, the Red Sea

Deserts the Sahara, the Gobi

- with musical instruments

Do you play the violin?

Can you play the piano?