

VS STENO



ENGLISH HANDBOOK



ARTICLES

CONCEPTS • RULES • EXCEPTIONS • SSC TRAPS • PRACTICE

SSC STENOGRAPHER

Grade C • 100 WPM | Grade D • 80 WPM

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EXAM MINDSET

When a blank comes before a noun, classify it first: countable/uncountable → singular/plural → specific/general → proper name/fixed expression. Then choose A/AN, THE, or Ø (no article).

01 • Article Basics

Articles are determiners placed before nouns. English uses the indefinite articles A and AN, the definite article THE, and the zero article (Ø), meaning no article.

CORE IDEA

A/AN = one non-specific member of a class. THE = a specific or identifiable member/group. Ø = no article, often for general plural/uncountable meaning or proper names.

FORM	MAIN IDEA	EXAMPLE
a / an	indefinite; one, non-specific	I saw a bird. / She ate an apple.
the	definite; specific/identified	The bird was on the wall.
Ø	zero article; general or named use	Birds can fly. / India is large.

First question: what kind of noun?

- **Singular countable:** normally needs a determiner—A/AN, THE, or another determiner such as my, this, each.
- **Plural countable:** may take THE for a specific set or Ø for general meaning.
- **Uncountable:** normally Ø for general meaning; THE is possible when a specific instance/quantity is identified.

CORRECT	TRAP
I bought a book.	I bought book.

FAST CHECK

If you can naturally say “one” and the noun is singular and countable, A/AN is often the first candidate—unless the noun is already specific.

02 • A / AN: Core Uses

A and AN are indefinite articles. Use them mainly with singular countable nouns when the listener or reader is not being asked to identify one particular member.

USE	PATTERN	EXAMPLE
First mention	a/an + singular countable noun	I saw a man near the gate.
One member of a class	a/an + noun	She is a teacher.
Classification	a/an + profession/type	This is a useful tool.
Meaning “one”	a/an + singular noun	I need a pen.
Any one member	a/an + noun	Take a seat.

A / AN cannot normally stand before...

- Plural nouns: a books $\times$ → books / the books.
- Uncountable nouns: an information $\times$ → information / a piece of information.
- Most proper names: a Rahul $\times$ when Rahul is simply a person's name.

CORRECT	TRAP
She bought a new phone.	She bought new phone.

SSC TRAP
A/AN does not mean “any noun”. In ordinary use it requires a singular countable noun. Check the noun before deciding the article.

03 • A vs AN: Sound Rule

The choice between A and AN depends on the sound immediately after the article—not simply the first written letter. A comes before a consonant sound; AN comes before a vowel sound.

PATTERN	CORRECT	WHY
Consonant sound	a university	/ju:/ begins with a consonant sound
Consonant sound	a European	/j/ sound
Consonant sound	a one-time fee	/w/ sound in one
Vowel sound	an hour	silent h; /aʊ/
Vowel sound	an honest man	silent h
Vowel sound	an MBA	/em/ sound
Vowel sound	an MLA	/em/ sound

Letter vs sound

Do not write “an university” just because university begins with the vowel letter u. Conversely, do not write “a hour” because hour begins with h.

CORRECT	TRAP
a useful idea	an useful idea

CORRECT	TRAP
an umbrella	a umbrella

MEMORY
Say the next word mentally. If its first sound is /y/, /w/, or another consonant sound → A. If it starts with a vowel sound → AN.

04 • A / AN: Special Uses

Competitive exams often test A/AN in patterns where the noun is not simply being introduced. The same indefinite and sound rules still operate.

PATTERN	EXAMPLE	POINT
Jobs / professions	She is a doctor.	job/classification
Rate / frequency	twice a day; ₹80 a kilo	per one unit
Exclamation	What a beautiful view!	singular countable noun
Such + noun	such a mistake	a + singular countable
Rather + noun	rather a difficult task	indefinite singular
Quite + noun	quite a surprise	indefinite singular
Half + noun	half a dozen	fixed quantity pattern

Profession pattern

When naming a person's occupation, A/AN is normally used: He is an engineer. She is a scientist. A job title used as a name or title may behave differently; do not apply the profession rule mechanically.

SSC TRAP

“What a/an ...!” is tested with singular countable nouns: What a pity! / What an idea! With uncountable or plural nouns, do not force A/AN.

05 • THE: Core Uses

THE is the definite article. It signals that the noun is identifiable or specific in the context. The reader/listener can understand which person, thing, or group is meant.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHY THE?
Second mention	I saw a dog. The dog was wet.	already mentioned
Known to both	Close the door.	shared context
Specific by description	The book on the table is mine.	description identifies it
Specific group	The students in this room are ready.	particular set
Unique in context	The principal is in the office.	one relevant person

A → THE sequence

A/AN often introduces a noun; THE then refers back to the identified noun.

FIRST MENTION	SECOND MENTION
I bought a pen.	The pen is blue.
She saw an accident.	The accident blocked the road.

FAST CHECK

Ask: “Can the reader identify exactly which one?” If yes because of previous mention, shared knowledge, or added information, THE is a strong candidate.

06 • THE: Unique & Defining Uses

THE is used when the noun is unique in the relevant context or is made definite by a limiting word or phrase.

PATTERN	EXAMPLE
Unique natural objects	the sun, the moon, the earth
Only	the only answer
Same	the same book
Whole	the whole day
Defining phrase	the road to the station
Ordinal position	the first page of the book
Shared environment	the newspaper; the internet

Only / same / first / last

- the only: The only solution is to wait.
- the same: We reached the same conclusion.
- ordinal position: the first chapter, the second attempt, the last train.
- whole + noun often takes THE when the whole set is specified: the whole book.

SSC TRAP

Words such as only, first, second, last and superlatives often make a following noun definite. Check the full phrase before choosing Ø.

07 • THE + Superlatives & Adjectives

THE commonly accompanies superlative adjectives and ordinal/sequence expressions when they identify one member as occupying a particular position.

PATTERN	EXAMPLE	NOTE
Superlative + noun	the best answer	one at the top of a set
Ordinal + noun	the first question	position in sequence
Comparative correlative	the more, the better	fixed structure
the + adjective	the rich; the poor	group of people
Numbered position	the second chapter	specific position

Superlative trap

CORRECT	TRAP
She is the tallest girl in the class.	She is tallest girl in the class.

After a superlative, the noun may be omitted when the meaning is already clear: Which option is the best? The article is tied to the superlative expression, not to a fixed requirement before every adjective.

REMEMBER
THE + superlative is a high-frequency exam pattern: the best, the worst, the highest, the most useful, the least expensive.

08 • THE + Geographical Names

Geographical names are a major source of article questions. The pattern depends on whether the name denotes an individual place or a named group/feature.

USUALLY THE	USUALLY Ø
the Ganges / the Nile	India / Japan
the Arabian Sea / the Pacific	Delhi / London
the Himalayas / the Alps	Mount Everest / Mount Fuji
the Thar Desert	Lake Victoria
the United States / the United Kingdom	Asia / Europe
the Bahamas / the Gambia	Punjab / Haryana

Group names

- Rivers, seas, oceans, deserts, mountain ranges and many groups of islands normally take THE.
- Most individual mountains, lakes, cities, streets and continents normally take Ø when the name itself is complete.
- Country names are mostly Ø, but names containing words such as United or a plural/group form commonly take THE.

SSC TRAP

Do not apply “all geographical names take the”. Compare: the Himalayas but Mount Everest; the Ganges but India; the Pacific but Asia.

09 • THE + Institutions & Names

THE is used with many names of institutions, buildings, newspapers and organizations when the name contains a common noun or belongs to a conventional named group.

CATEGORY	EXAMPLES
Organizations / institutions	the United Nations; the World Bank
Newspapers	the Times; the Guardian
Famous buildings / monuments	the Taj Mahal; the Eiffel Tower
Museums / galleries	the British Museum; the National Gallery
Facilities	the airport; the station; the bank
Named groups	the police; the government (when definite)

University names

A university named directly by a proper name often has Ø: Harvard University, Delhi University. Names containing “of” commonly take THE: the University of Delhi, the University of Oxford.

EXAM CHECK

Look at the whole proper name. Do not insert THE merely because a place is important; article choice depends on the naming pattern.

10 • ZERO ARTICLE: General Meaning

The zero article (Ø) is a grammatical choice. It is common when plural countable nouns or uncountable nouns are used in a general sense.

MEANING	CORRECT	NOT THE GENERAL MODEL
Plural in general	Books are useful.	The books are useful. X for all books
Uncountable in general	Water is essential.	The water is essential. X if no specific water
Abstract idea	Honesty matters.	The honesty matters. X in general
Material/substance	Gold is valuable.	The gold is valuable. X if general
Animals as a class	Dogs are loyal.	The dogs are loyal. X if dogs generally

When THE returns

THE can be added when the noun becomes specific: The water in this bottle is cold. The books on the table are mine. The honesty of the witness impressed the judge.

CORE CONTRAST

Books = books in general. The books = a particular set. Water = water in general. The water = particular water identified by context or description.

11 • ZERO ARTICLE: Names & Activities

Many proper names and activity nouns normally take Ø. The key is whether the word is functioning as a name, a general field/activity, or a specific place/thing.

CATEGORY	Ø EXAMPLES
Continents / countries / cities	Asia, India, Delhi
Languages	English, Hindi, French
School subjects	History, Mathematics, Physics
Sports	cricket, football, tennis
Meals (general)	breakfast, lunch, dinner
Days / months	Monday, September
Streets / individual lakes / mountains	MG Road, Lake Victoria, Mount Everest

Specific meaning can change the article

- We had lunch. → general meal activity.
- The lunch served at the conference was excellent. → specific meal.
- History is interesting. → subject in general.
- The history of India is complex. → a specific field/body of history.

SSC TRAP

Do not use THE before languages, school subjects, sports, months or most country/city names simply because the sentence is definite in meaning.

12 • Institutional Expressions

Some nouns can appear with Ø when the person is using the institution for its primary social purpose. THE is used when the place is treated as a particular building or location.

Ø: PRIMARY PURPOSE	THE: PARTICULAR PLACE
go to school = study	go to the school = visit the building
be in hospital = receive treatment	be at the hospital = be at the building
go to prison = be imprisoned	go to the prison = visit the prison
go to bed = sleep	sit on the bed = a particular bed
go to work = perform one's job	go to the workplace / the office = specific place
go home = return home	clean the home / the house = specific dwelling

Meaning decides

The contrast is semantic, not simply a memorised list. Compare: She went to school. (as a student) / She went to the school. (to visit the place or someone there).



SSC TRAP

In error spotting, check whether the noun denotes the institution's function or the physical place. That distinction often decides Ø vs THE.

Reference Notes & Source Trail

The chapter was checked against established learner-grammar references. The exam-oriented traps are a study layer built from these documented article rules.

SOURCE	KEY RULES CHECKED	USE HERE
Cambridge — A/an and the	A/AN meaning; sound rule; countable vs uncountable; general vs specific	Core article rules
Cambridge — Place names	THE with rivers/seas/ranges/deserts; Ø with many countries/cities/lakes/mountains	Geography + names
Cambridge — Comparison: adjectives	THE with superlatives and ordinal/sequence patterns	Superlatives
British Council — Articles: a, an, the	jobs; singular countable nouns; first mention; A vs AN; THE for known/specific nouns	A/AN/THE basics
British Council — the or no article	school/hospital/prison; bed/work/home; place names; rivers/seas/ranges	Ø vs THE + institutions

SOURCE NOTE

“SSC trap” and option-elimination labels are instructional framing for competitive-exam revision, not quotations of an official SSC grammar rulebook.



13 • Fixed Article Patterns & SSC Traps

Learn the fixed patterns first; then use the trap table to eliminate options quickly.

AREA	PATTERN	EXAMPLE
Transport	by + transport	by bus; by train
Specific vehicle	on/in the + vehicle	on the bus; in the car
Time	in the morning / at night	in the evening; at night
Institution	Ø for primary purpose	go to school; in hospital
Names	proper names often Ø	India; English; Monday
Specific place	THE for identified place	the school; the hospital

SSC trap check

#	TRAP	FAST CHECK
1	A/AN + plural/uncountable	Reject A/AN.
2	A vs AN	Check sound, not spelling.
3	First vs known	A/AN first; THE identified.
4	General vs specific	Ø general; THE specific.
5	Superlative / first / only	Usually THE.
6	Geography	rivers/ranges/seas → THE.
7	Institution	function → Ø; building → THE.
8	Determiner clash	my/this/some/each + noun; no article.

DECISION TREE

Singular countable → determiner. Specific → THE. Non-specific → A/AN by sound. Plural/uncountable → Ø if general, THE if specific.

One-Page Revision • Articles

CHECK	WHAT TO REMEMBER
1. A / AN	Singular countable, non-specific; first mention/classification.
2. A vs AN	Choose by sound: a university, an hour, an MBA.
3. THE	Specific/known/previously mentioned or identified by a phrase.
4. Unique	the sun, the moon, the earth in ordinary physical-world reference.
5. Superlative	the best, the most useful, the highest.
6. Ordinal / sequence	the first, the second, the last.
7. General plural	Ø: Books are useful. THE only for a specific set.
8. General uncountable	Ø: Water is essential. THE if specific.
9. Geography	the Ganges / the Alps / the Pacific; India / Asia / Mount Everest.
10. Proper names	Most persons, cities, countries, languages, subjects, sports → Ø.
11. Institutions	go to school/hospital/prison → Ø for primary purpose; THE for a particular place.
12. Meals / days / months	Ø in ordinary general use: lunch, Monday, September.
13. Determiner clash	my/this/some/each + noun: no extra article.
14. Fixed transport	by bus/train/car; on the bus; in the car.

MASTER FORMULA

NOUN TYPE → SPECIFIC OR GENERAL → PROPER NAME? → FIXED EXPRESSION? → A/AN vs THE vs Ø

MEMORISE THESE

a university • an hour • the first • the best • the Ganges • India • Ø English • Ø breakfast • go to school • go to the school

15 • Practice Set • Part I

Choose the correct option. Use the rule, not intuition. Ø means no article.

1. She is ___ honest officer. (a / an / the / Ø)
2. He bought ___ new umbrella yesterday. (a / an / the / Ø)
3. ___ umbrella he bought is black. (A / An / The / Ø)
4. I saw ___ European tourist at the station. (a / an / the / Ø)
5. We visited ___ Taj Mahal last year. (a / an / the / Ø)
6. ___ water is essential for life. (A / An / The / Ø)
7. Please pass me ___ water in this bottle. (a / an / the / Ø)
8. She goes to ___ school every morning. (a / an / the / Ø)
9. I went to ___ school to meet her teacher. (a / an / the / Ø)
10. He is ___ engineer. (a / an / the / Ø)
11. ___ Himalayas are visible from here. (A / An / The / Ø)
12. Mount Everest is in ___ Himalayas. (a / an / the / Ø)

PRACTICE RULE

For every blank, classify the noun first: singular countable / plural / uncountable / proper name. Then test specific vs general.

15 • Practice Set • Part II

13. She had ___ lunch at noon. (a / an / the / Ø)
14. ___ lunch served at the conference was excellent. (A / An / The / Ø)
15. ___ honesty is important in public life. (A / An / The / Ø)
16. ___ honesty of the witness impressed the judge. (A / An / The / Ø)
17. This is ___ best answer. (a / an / the / Ø)
18. He arrived on ___ Monday. (a / an / the / Ø)
19. She speaks ___ English fluently. (a / an / the / Ø)
20. They travelled by ___ train. (a / an / the / Ø)
21. We were waiting on ___ train. (a / an / the / Ø)
22. He is in ___ hospital as a patient. (a / an / the / Ø)
23. His brother is visiting him at ___ hospital. (a / an / the / Ø)
24. ___ United States is a large country. (A / An / The / Ø)
25. ___ India is in South Asia. (A / An / The / Ø)

FINAL 10-SECOND TEST

If you are stuck, ask four questions: noun type? specific? proper name? fixed expression? Only then choose A/AN, THE, or Ø.



16 • Answer Key + Compact Logic • Part I

Q	ANSWER	WHY
1	an	honest begins with a vowel sound; singular countable officer.
2	an	umbrella begins with a vowel sound; first/non-specific mention.
3	The	the umbrella is already identified by the previous sentence.
4	a	European begins with /j/ (consonant) sound.
5	the	Taj Mahal is a specific famous monument.
6	Ø	water is uncountable and used in a general sense.
7	the	“in this bottle” identifies which water.
8	Ø	go to school = attend school; institutional purpose.
9	the	the school is a particular building being visited.
10	an	engineer begins with a vowel sound.
11	The	Himalayas is a mountain range.
12	the	the Himalayas is the named range.

KEY PATTERN

Questions 1–12 combine the three article systems: A/AN by countability + sound, THE by identification, and Ø by general/institutional use.

16 • Answer Key • Part II + Source Trail

Q	ANSWER	WHY
13	Ø	lunch is a general meal activity.
14	the	the lunch is a specific meal identified by the conference.
15	Ø	honesty is an abstract noun in general meaning.
16	the	the honesty is made specific by “of the witness”.
17	the	best is a superlative identifying one answer.
18	Ø	days of the week normally take no article in ordinary date reference.
19	Ø	English is the name of a language.
20	Ø	by + transport uses zero article: by train.
21	the	the train refers to a particular vehicle being waited for.
22	Ø	in hospital = receiving treatment; institutional purpose.
23	the	the hospital = particular place/building being visited.
24	the	United States is a conventional country name with THE.
25	Ø	India is a country name normally used without an article.



PRACTICE. EVALUATE. IMPROVE.

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