DEFINITE & INDEFINITE ARTICLES
Second lesson – Deuxième leçon
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ARTICLES: AN INTRODUCTION

- In French, a noun is usually introduced by a determiner.

- Articles (indefinite, definite and partitive) form one of the main groups of determiners in French.

- In this lesson, we introduce the forms and main uses of indefinite and definite articles.
THE INDEFINITE ARTICLE
I. THE INDEFINITE ARTICLE

- The indefinite article in French has **three forms**.

- The singular indefinite articles **un** (m.) or **une** (f.) are the English **a/an**.

- The plural **des** corresponds to **some** has the same form for both genders.
# 1. FORMS

## The indefinite articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>SINGULAR</th>
<th>PLURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Un</td>
<td>Des</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Une</td>
<td>Des</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. **How to Choose Indefinite Articles**

- Which indefinite article to use depends on two things: **the noun’s gender and number**.
- The noun’s gender (masculine or feminine)
  Un garçon  a boy
  Une fille  a girl

- The noun’s number (singular or plural)
  Des garçons  (some) boys
  Des filles  (some) girls
3. BASIC MEANINGS AND USES

- In both cases – singular or plural – indefinite articles refer to an unspecified person or thing.
It is translated as *a/an*

Il y a *un garçon* dans la classe.
*There is a boy in the classroom.*

Il y a *une fille* dans la classe.
*There is a girl in the classroom.*

It is translated as *some*

Il y a *des garçons* dans la classe.
*There are (some) boys in the classroom.*

Il y a *des filles* dans la classe.
*There are (some) girls in the classroom.*
3.1 OMISSION OF INDEFINITE ARTICLES

When referring to a person’s profession or religion in French, the indefinite article is not used.

- *Il est professeur.*  
  *He is a professor.*
- *Elle est étudiante.*  
  *She is a student.*
The indefinite article must be used when the person’s profession or religion is preceded by a qualifying word (adjective):

- *Il est un excellent professeur.*
  
  *He is an excellent professor*

- *Elle est une excellente étudiante.*
  
  *She is an excellent student*
THE DEFINITE ARTICLE
II. THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

- There are four forms of the definite article in French.
- The singular definite articles *le, la, l’* and the plural *les,*
- All of which correspond to *the* in English.
1. FORMS

**Definite articles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Le</td>
<td>Les</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>La</td>
<td>Les</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before vowel or h</td>
<td>L’</td>
<td>Les</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. **How to Choose Definite Articles**

- The use of definite article depends on three different things:
  - The noun’s **gender** (feminine or masculine)
  - The noun’s **number** (singular or plural)
  - The noun’s **first letter** (vowel or consonant)
Singular forms
Masculine - feminine

Le garçon [the] boy
La fille [the] girl

Note: definite articles are often omitted in English.

Plural form
Masculine and feminine

Les garçons [the] boy
Les filles [the] boy

Note: definite articles are often omitted in English.
2.1 THE NOUN + VOWEL OR MUTE H

- The definite articles le and la contract to l’ (masculine or feminine) when a noun starts with a vowel or mute H.

- If the noun (masculine or feminine) is plural, use les.
Nouns starting with a vowel

**Singular:**
L’ami (masculine)
[the] friend

L’amie (feminine)
[the] friend

**Plural:**
Les amis
[the] friends

Les amies
[The] friends

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Nouns starting with H mute

**Singular:**
L’homme (masculine)
[the] man

L’histoire (feminine)
[the] history

**Plural:**
Les hommes
[The] men

Les histoires
[The] histories
2.2 THE H MUTE

- The **h muet** or *mute h*, is never pronounced but it affects determiners in two ways.

- As you have already noticed, there is a contraction of the definite articles **le/la** before nouns such as:

  - [La] histoire → l’histoire
However...

- There are some exceptions where there is no contraction.

- The reason for this is etymological.

- The best way to remember which ones allow contractions and which do not, is to learn the words themselves.
OBSERVE:

H nouns from Latin: use l’

L’heure  
[the] time
L’horaire  
[the] timetable
L’hôtel  
[the] hotel
L’hypothèse  
[the] hypothesis

H nouns from Germanic languages: use le

La honte  
[The] shame
Le héros  
[The] hero
La Hollande  
Holland
Le hasard  
[The] coincidence
3. BASIC MEANINGS AND USES

Use definite articles to indicate:

- a specific noun
- a general meaning of the noun
**A DEFINITE ARTICLE**

**Introduces a specific noun**

- *L’histoire de la France*
  - The history of France

- *La faculté de Sciences*
  - The faculty of Sciences

**Indicates a general meaning of a noun**

- *La vie est belle!*
  - Life is beautiful!

- *L’amour est compliqué!*
  - Love is complicated!
C’est tout pour aujourd’hui!

Au revoir!

Merci!