

The article the and no article (Ø) in IELTS

One-page cheat sheet · Grammatical Range & Accuracy · ~~struck out~~ = extra, [the] = missing

The main rule: general idea → no article (Ø society, Ø education, Ø children). Specific, already known, one of a kind → the (the society we live in, the internet).

Typical mistakes → fixed

✗	✓
The society should help the old people.	Society should help old people / the elderly.
The education is the key to the success.	Education is the key to success.
[The] government should invest...	The government / Governments should...
[The] number of students increased.	The number of students increased.
[The] environment is under threat.	The environment is under threat.

Three-question check for every noun

1. **Does the reader know which one?** Mentioned before, one of a kind, defined in the sentence, superlative → **the**.
2. **If not — one of many?** Singular countable → **a/an**.
3. **If not — a general idea?** Plural or uncountable → **Ø**.

Then scan the special cases: the environment, the government, the internet, the number of, the UK — and Ø in go to school, at university, by car.

When to use the

- **Second mention:** A new law was passed. The law banned... · a sharp rise → the rise
- **One of a kind:** the sun, the world, the internet, the media, the environment, the economy, the public, the government, the police
- **Defined in the sentence:** the quality of education in rural areas · the people who live near airports · the cost of living (but a lack of, a number of)
- **Superlatives, ordinals:** the most important, the first step, the only solution, the same, the next generation · one of the most serious problems
- **the number of ≠ a number of:** The number of tourists **was** 3m · A number of tourists **were** unhappy
- **the + adjective = a group:** the elderly, the young, the poor, the unemployed ✗ the elderly people
- **Whole class (formal):** The smartphone has changed... = Smartphones have changed... ✗ Smartphone has changed
- **Instruments:** play the piano · **sport:** play Ø football · on the radio, but on Ø TV, by Ø email

Names

With the	No article
the UK, the USA, the UAE, the Netherlands · the Amu Darya, the Aral Sea, the Pacific, the Kyzylkum · the Alps, the Tian Shan · the United Nations, the University of Cambridge	Ø Uzbekistan, Ø China · Ø Tashkent · Ø Lake Issyk-Kul, Ø Everest · Ø Asia · Ø Cambridge University

When the is wrong

- **General plurals and uncountables:** Ø students, Ø money, Ø health, Ø crime, Ø unemployment, Ø nature, Ø life, Ø pollution
- **Most = the majority:** Ø Most people agree (the most = the greatest number)
- **Meals, languages, subjects, illnesses:** have Ø breakfast · speak Ø English · study Ø history · Ø diabetes (but the history of Samarkand)
- **One determiner only:** ✗ the my friend, the Tashkent's metro → my friend, Tashkent's metro / the Tashkent metro

Purpose vs building

go to Ø school · at Ø university · in Ø hospital (UK) · go to Ø work · at Ø home · go to Ø bed	went to the school to meet the teacher · the university is near the metro · visited him at the hospital
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Pairs people mix up

- Ø nature (the natural world) · the nature of the problem (essence)
- Ø life in Ø cities · life in the city (vs the countryside)
- Ø next year (from now) · the next year (after a past event)
- at Ø night · in the evening, in the morning

Writing Task 1

The chart shows... · the proportion of households · the number of visitors · the amount of energy · the figure for coal · in the 1990s · over the period · by the end of the year · the highest figure · the lowest point — **but** in the overview: Overall, Ø coal remained the main source of energy in Ø Germany.

Quick test — the, a/an or nothing?

1. ___ government should spend more on ___ public transport.
2. ___ number of cars has doubled since 2010.
3. ___ elderly often feel lonely.
4. My brother is at ___ university in ___ UK.
5. ___ pollution is one of ___ most serious problems in ___ world.
6. ___ Amu Darya flows into ___ Aral Sea.

Answers: 1 The government, Ø public transport · 2 The number of (+ has) · 3 The elderly · 4 at Ø university, the UK · 5 Ø Pollution, the most, the world · 6 The Amu Darya, the Aral Sea