

Unit 28 - Articles (2) - omission of articles

1 After negatives

1.1 General rule

Generally the indefinite and partitive articles in French take the form *de* after the negatives *ne ... pas*, *ne ... jamais*, *ne ... plus* and *ne ... guère* :

J'ai **une** voiture - Je n'ai pas **de** voiture

I have a car - I don't have a car

J'ai **du** tabac - Je n'ai pas **de** tabac

I have some tobacco - I don't have any tobacco

Generally no article is used after the preposition *sans* (which is in effect a negative) :

Il est actuellement **sans** emploi

He's currently unemployed

Elle prend toujours son thé **sans** lait

She always has her tea without milk

1.2 Exceptions

The rule does **not** apply, however, if the negative refers to the identity of the noun in question rather than to its quantity. This applies to the following circumstances :

1.2.1 After the verb *être* :

Ce n'est pas **une** maison du 18^{ième} siècle

It's not an 18th-century house

Ce n'était pas **un** bon élève quand il était jeune

He wasn't a good student when he was young

1.2.2 Where a distinction is being made between two nouns :

Nous n'avons pas mangé **du** boeuf mais **du** porc

We didn't eat beef but pork

1.2.3 Where *un* or *une* represents the number *one* or has the sense of *a single one* :

Je n'ai pas vu **un** (seul) enfant

I didn't see one (or a single) child

1.2.4 Remember that *du*, *de l'*, *de la* and *des* are not always the partitive or plural indefinite articles but can also be the definite article preceded by *de*. In this case they remain unchanged in the negative :

Il ne se souvenait pas **de** l'enfant

He didn't remember the child

2 Before names of professions etc.

2.1 General rule

The article is generally absent before the complements of linking verbs such as *être*, *devenir*, *paraître* etc. when putting someone in a general class, profession etc :

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Il est avocat depuis 1986
He's been a lawyer since 1986
On dit qu'il était résistant pendant la guerre
They say he was in the Resistance during the war
Il a été nommé Directeur Général en 1996
He was made Managing Director in 1996

2.2 Exceptions

2.2.1 This is **not** the case after *c'est* :

C'est **un** socialiste / conservateur
He's a socialist / conservative

2.2.2 An article is also present where the name of profession etc. is modified by a describing word or phrase such as an adjective, noun complement or relative clause. This is because the modifying information serves to narrow the frame of reference from the general to the particular. Compare for example :

Marie est journaliste à L'Express
Marie's a journalist with L'Express
but Marie est **un** très bon journaliste
Marie's a very good journalist

Mr Dupont est professeur de maths à l'école de notre fille
Mr Dupont is a maths teacher at our daughter's school
but Mr Dupont est **le** professeur de maths de ma fille
Mr Dupont is my daughter's maths teacher
Mr Dupont est **le** professeur de maths avec qui nous avons parlé
Mr Dupont is the maths teacher we talked with

3 Before nouns in apposition

3.1 When a common noun (such as *maire*) is inserted after a proper noun (such as *Mme Chevalier*) to provide identification, the common noun is said to be in **apposition**. The article is often absent before a noun used in apposition :

Mme Chevalier, maire de la ville depuis 1996, s'est déclarée contre le projet
Mme Chevalier, the town's mayor since 1996, declared herself to be against the plan

3.2 However, the definite article is generally used when the noun in apposition is modified, for example, by an adjective :

On parlait de Raymond Devos, **le** célèbre comique
They were talking of Raymond Devos, the famous comedian

4 Before preceding adjective

In written French *des* generally takes the form *de* when the noun has a preceding adjective :

des nouvelles ⇒ **de** bonnes nouvelles - (some) good news
des fleurs ⇒ **de** jolies fleurs - (some) pretty flowers

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However it remains unchanged when adjective and noun are so strongly associated as to constitute an idiom :

des petits pains - *some bread rolls*

du bon sens - *common sense*

Furthermore, this rule is generally not observed in **spoken** French :

T'as eu **des** bonnes notes à l'examen ?

Did you get good marks in the exam ?

5 Before noun complements introduced by *de* or *à*

In general no article is present before a noun complement introduced by *de* or *à*, that is when the preposition + noun acts as an adjective :

un profil **de** carrière

a career profile

un réseau **d'**ordinateurs

a computer network

un couteau **à** découper

a carving knife

les conditions **de** travail

working conditions

les patrons **d'**industrie

company bosses

une corbeille **à** linge

a laundry basket

There are, however, some exceptions :

l'égalité **des** rémunérations

equal pay

la crise **du** logement

the housing crisis

Furthermore, when the noun complement itself is modified by a describing word, the article is generally present :

mes clefs **de** voiture

my car keys

but

les clefs **de la** voiture de mon père

the keys to my father's car

6 After the preposition *de*

Generally the articles *du*, *de l'*, *de la* and *des* are omitted in constructions involving the preposition *de*. These can be divided into two categories (in addition to the noun complement construction mentioned in section 5 above) :

6.1 Expressions of quantity

These include all numerical constructions (*un million de personnes* / *une dizaine de fois*) plus more general expressions of quantity such as :

beaucoup / peu **de** bruit

A lot of / not much noise

plus / moins **d'**argent

more / less money

tant **de** jeunes

so many young people

trop / assez **de** travail

too much / enough work

un demi-kilo **de** beurre

half a kilo of butter

une bouteille **de** vin

a bottle of wine

Exceptions are : *la plupart*, *bien*, *la majeure partie*, *la majorité*, *encore*.

Nous avons eu bien **du** mal à les convaincre

We had a lot of difficulty convincing them

Note, however, that expressions such as *beaucoup de*, *tant de* etc. do take *du*, *de la*, *de l'*, *des* when the noun in question is specific (it will usually be preceded by *the* in English). Compare, for example :

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Il y a beaucoup **de** cadres qui sont d'accord avec les mesures

There are a lot of managers who agree with the measures

Beaucoup **des** cadres interrogés ont dit qu'ils étaient d'accord avec les mesures

A lot of the managers questioned said that they agreed with the measures

6.2 Verb constructions

These include certain verbs followed by *de*, or certain adjectives or nouns forming part of a verb construction, such as : *manquer de*, *changer de*, *parler de*, *charger de*, *être vêtu de*, *être couvert de*, *être plein de*, *être dépourvu de*, *avoir besoin de*, *faire preuve de*.

Il ne manque pas **de** détracteurs

He's not short of critics

Elle a fait preuve **de** courage et **de** perspicacité en prenant cette décision

She showed courage and vision in taking this decision

As with the rule regarding expressions of quantity, the above verbs or verbal expressions can be followed by *du*, *de la*, *de l'*, *des* when the noun in question is specific. Compare, for example :

J'ai besoin **d'**argent pour finir le projet

I need money to finish the project

J'ai besoin **de l'**argent que tu m'as promis pour finir le projet

I need the money you promised me to finish the project

7 In lists

Articles are generally omitted in lists :

Tout est en solde : jupes, robes, vestes, pantalons, pullovers, manteaux

Everything's on sale : skirts, dresses, jackets, trousers, jumpers, coats

This is also true for newspaper headlines, book titles, classified advertisements etc :

Chômage en baisse

Unemployment down

Dictionnaire de la langue française

Dictionary of the French Language

Maison à vendre / Cadre 29 ans rech. emploi

House for sale / Manager 29 seeks work