

34. Articles (2) - the indefinite and partitive articles

1 The indefinite article *un, une, des*

1.1 Singular *un, une*

Un, une are generally used in the same way as their English equivalents *a, an*: they refer to an item in a category that has not been specified:

Il faut choisir **un** jour où Marie est disponible
We must choose a day when Marie is available
Va lui chercher **une** chaise de l'autre salle
Go and get him / her a chair from the other room

1.2 *Un, une* are used when referring to a noun in a general sense to mean the whole of its class or type:

Une jeune personne est souvent prête à accepter des conditions de travail plus flexibles
A young person is often prepared to accept more flexible working hours

1.3 French also uses *un, une* when an abstract noun (one referring to something non-physical like a concept or action) is qualified by an adjective, and where English would often use no article:

Elle a fait preuve d'**un** courage extraordinaire
She showed extraordinary courage
C'est une ville d'**une** beauté étonnante
It's a town of astonishing beauty

1.4 *Des*

Des is the plural form of the indefinite article:

Le 12 est **un** jour où Marie est disponible
The 12th is a day when Marie is available
Le 12 et le 15 sont **des** jours où Marie est disponible
The 12th and the 15th are days when Marie is available

2 The partitive article *du, de la*

The partitive article *du, de la* (both forms are contracted to *de l'* in front of a vowel) is used before nouns that cannot be counted or that indicate an undetermined quantity. It is usually translated by no article in English, but in questions or negatives it is often translated by *any*:

Pour faire le gâteau, il faut **du** beurre, **du** sucre et **de la** farine
To make the cake you need butter, sugar and flour
Il faut **du** courage pour être alpiniste
It takes courage to be a mountaineer
Est-ce qu'il y a **de la** farine?
Is there any flour?