Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my deep appreciation to my advisor, Elizabeth Tannenbaum for her wonderful support, suggestions and guidance in completing my IPP.

To Susan Sakayori, who gave me exceptional support and encouragement to participate in the graduate program at SIT and pursue my professional and personal goals.

To Calum Adamson, who is my most supportive and trustworthy partner in teaching, for helping me as a reader as well as an editor for my IPP.

To Noriko Nishiguchi, who gave me warm support and wisdom and contributed her ideas about teaching to this thesis.

To Mineko Nakamura, who always supported me lovingly; personally as well as professionally.

To Ramilla Popovic for helping me with her wealth of knowledge in the field of Linguistics and giving me her loving support.

To Mimi Collins for inspiring me with her outstanding work and giving me her warm support for this thesis.

To Asuka Kitano for being a terrific active listener and supporter.

To Michiyo Ozawa Broughton for her warm encouragement and support in my participation in the graduate program and for showing me her profoundly admirable attitude towards life.

To Mary Walters, who also gave me special support in participating in the graduate program and for my survey.

To Tatsuo Fujii, who was the director of our school, for making a special effort for me to participate in the graduate program.

To Miyako Sugimura, Joan Miller, Bob Sanderson, Jonathan Bolick, for helping me with my survey and giving me their warmest encouragement and support.
To Gary Bloom for offering his help kind-heartedly in final proofreading my IPP.

To Simon Link for helping me format the most crucial chart for this thesis and giving
me his kind support.

To Robert Perkins for making such a thoughtful, special effort in helping me with my research.

To Sean Conley for giving me a chance to work with Elizabeth and being incredibly supportive as the brilliant director of SMAT program.

To Diane Larsen-Freeman for teaching me the joy of ‘Grammaring’ and helping renew my perception of English grammar.

To Elka Todeva for her wisdom in teaching articles and other aspects of the language.

To Mike Jerald, who was my IYTP advisor for giving me valuable learning experience throughout my IYTP week.

To Sharon Otani, Dale Watkins and so many other people who kindly took time to fill out the questionnaires for my survey.

To all of the SMAT 20s for being such fantastic classmates.

To all of my teachers at SIT for being so inspiring and supportive.

To all of my students and co-workers who helped me grow as a person and a teacher.

To my brother for giving me encouragement in achieving my goal.

My final thanks especially to my parents who supported me all my life and always tried to give me their best to help me pursue my passion and dreams, while practicing simple and modest living.

Without all the warmest and most extraordinary support from everyone, I could not have achieved my goal so joyously.

I thank all of you from the bottom of my heart.
Abstract
This dissertation is about English articles and specifically the difficulties that non-native speakers, particularly Japanese learners, face in mastering their use. In this dissertation, I will mainly focus on:

1. An investigation on teaching articles and the use of articles including a survey completed by teachers of English
2. Two charts for determining articles and categories with examples including my adaptation of the chart
3. Some ideas and practical suggestions for teaching articles

The findings from this study have led me to a belief that there are ways for Japanese learners to improve their ability to use articles and by exposing ourselves to authentic input as well as learning consciously, it is possible to learn to use articles more accurately and appropriately. Of course, it is crucial to have enough input to develop a feeling for articles and this can be achieved in part through sufficient reading and by listening to ‘authentic’ materials. Nonetheless, focused learning is indispensable for more effective acquisition. If we learn the system of articles in a more tangible way and are provided with opportunities to use them, the number of errors made will decrease. Most importantly we need to be aware that language acquisition is effective when aspects of language such as articles, grammatical structures and vocabulary are learned with some context.

As Diane Larsen-Freeman and Marianne Celce-Murcia suggest in *The Grammar Book*, it is important to look at the form, meaning and use together when learning grammar. When people consider ‘grammar’, often they think only of the form and patterns used. However, the study of grammar is not simply learning about parts of speech, word order, and specific patterns. The communication system must be examined in its entirety, including aspects of pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, sentence structures and their meaning and use. Since specific language is chosen in each situation and used with a purpose, we cannot separate the whole and its parts. We cannot discuss how to use articles (parts) without sentences or discourse/paragraphs (the whole). Grammatical description of language involves more complicated processes than is at first apparent in determining which article to use when considering exactly what we are trying to convey.

It is indeed a challenge to be able to choose the most appropriate way to express ourselves in various situations in a foreign language. In order to attain the level where we are able to use the language comfortably and confidently in the situations we come across, we need to maintain consistent efforts to become a better learner. Most of all, we must keep our passion and belief in the possibility that our goals can be achieved.

ERIC descriptors
GRAMMAR LANGUAGE USAGE CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES
CLASS ACTIVITIES SECOND LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION
Table of Contents

Chapter                                                                 Page

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1

2. The Investigation ................................................................................................. 11
   2.1 Questionnaire 1
   2.2 Questionnaire 2

3. Review of the Literature ................................................................................... 23

4. Charts for determining articles and categories with examples ...................... 30
   4.1 The Binary System
   4.2 A chart adapted from Brender (1989) and some useful categories
       for teaching

5. Teaching Implications ....................................................................................... 60

6. Possible Classroom Activities .......................................................................... 77

7. Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 107

Appendix
1. An enlarged chart for determining articles adapted from Brender
2. A poem from ‘Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul’
3. Reading lesson plan
4. Poems by students
5. List of books for poems and quotations
6. Books that were used in class/recommended to students
7. Examples of cartoons for an activity in class

Bibliography ........................................................................................................... 125
1. Introduction

One of the most difficult challenges in learning a foreign language is to fully understand a concept that does not exist in one’s native language and to master how to use it accurately or in the most appropriate way. Learning how to use articles is such an obstacle for many Japanese learners of English.

While other parts of speech, such as nouns or verbs, are innumerable, there are only 4 articles (a, an, the, and no article) in English. (This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.) It may seem paradoxical that even some advanced learners cannot use these seemingly simple words correctly, while they are capable of using complicated grammatical structures or extensive vocabulary naturally and confidently. Why are articles so difficult to master? Here are my assumptions.

1. In the Japanese language there are no articles.

2. Learners can often ‘get by’ getting their meaning across without using articles correctly. Therefore, they do not pay much attention to article use or are not fully aware of the errors they are making.

3. Use of articles is not taught particularly effectively in Japanese language classrooms, and because of this, learners often do not learn to use articles consciously or accurately. Subsequently, unless they have to work on writing or formal speech, which requires more accuracy, they do not tend to look at article errors closely.

4. We should also bear in mind that even if learners realize that they have problems in
using articles, it is difficult for them to know exactly what to do to improve their
ability in this area.

The first point is discussed in the literature on linguistics and I believe it to be the
greatest and most influential reason for inaccuracy with the use of articles. In the
Japanese language, there is no equivalent to the English article, and there are not
singular/plural or countable/uncountable systems as in English. We may use a
demonstrative (Simplistically, there are three: *kono* (this), *sono* (that), *ano* (the one over
there)), numbers or quantifying expressions such as *many, some, a few*. For example, in
English we can say;

- I bought *a book*.
- I bought *the book*.
- I bought *3 books*.
- I bought *these books*.
- I bought *many books*.

It is necessary to use a determiner or *-s* at the end. In Japanese, we do not mark plural
by adding anything to the end of the noun. In other words, in Japanese we can say;

- I bought *book*.
- I bought *3 book*.
- I bought *many book*.

We may specify the number of the books we bought, use a quantifying expression or
simply say 'book' when it is not important to state how many we bought.

As for the second point, it may be that there are other aspects of the language
that teachers feel require more urgent attention. Students also may prefer to work on aspects of language that allow them a quicker route towards a degree of fluency. Since misuse of articles usually does not cause a significant breakdown in communication where mistakes with some other grammatical aspects might, there seems to be no immediate need to master them. In addition, classroom logistics, such as the size of the class, focus of the lesson and constraints on time, often do not allow students to focus sufficiently on their article errors.

The third assumption is based as much on my own experience as a learner as on my experience as an English instructor. I believe that generally teachers in Japan do not try to teach the use of articles systematically, instead correcting misuse as and when errors or questions arise and teaching the correct usage for that specific context only. In the rather rigid system that is mirrored in almost all Japanese junior high and high schools, English classes are divided into categories such as 'grammar', 'reading' and 'oral communication'. In grammar classes at those schools, teachers usually use a grammar book which has chapters divided according to parts of speech or grammatical points. Teachers explain the usage of articles with example sentences and students study the rules by looking at these examples. I am not fully aware of the present situations in different schools, but it seems that junior high or high schools still focus on the necessity of learning English grammar as an academic subject to enable students to get
into universities which require students to take competitive entrance exams. Generally, English grammar is taught by focusing on the forms of the language without providing students with any opportunity to learn about the meaning and especially the use-in-context of that meaning. In oral communication classes or language schools, I suppose ‘communication’ is more focused on rather than minor grammatical aspects such as article use that may not interfere with meaning so much. Thus, articles are seldom taught in a way that allows learners to systematically or consciously acquire the competence in using them correctly.

When we discuss the ‘effectiveness’ of language teaching, various viewpoints and opinions arise. It is not a simple matter because we always encounter the dilemma between ideal goals and practical goals. Ideally, teaching should focus on assisting students’ individual growth and pursuit of their own goals through language learning as well as developing their skills in language competence. And to develop their skills, it is necessary to work on the areas where students need guidance. However, practically as I mentioned earlier, what we focus on in class seems to be decided depending more on the urgency of language items which need to be taught for students to achieve their immediate goals. Considering the above, whether learning how to use articles can practically be useful to all students or not is highly questionable since it may be a minor area that both students and teachers wish to spend less time on in comparison to other language items. This reason and others cited above may partially explain why Japanese
students’ acquisition of articles takes place much later than acquisition of other aspects of the language.

Finally, in my fourth assumption, I pointed out the fact that it is not easy for learners to solve their problems in the use of articles on their own. Since which article to use depends largely on the context, without knowing the system or rules, it is difficult for non-native speakers to learn to use articles correctly. Without some kind of guidance, it may be incredibly difficult for learners to overcome the difficulties involved and they may face challenges and frustration when trying to master how to use articles.

Directed by the above assumptions, I carried out a survey to discover how articles are taught in Japan, how much they are focused on in the language learning process, how important it is to learn how to use articles, and what kind of practical ideas there are for teaching articles. I distributed questionnaires to teachers who are currently teaching in Japan. I will describe the details of this investigation in a later chapter. In summary, the result of the survey shows that teachers generally do not teach how to use articles as a lesson target, and study in classrooms does not seem to focus on students’ article errors. Most teachers consider article errors as minor problems and only make corrections in their students’ writing, or when accuracy is more focused on than fluency. Although there are teachers who work on their students’ errors by using certain
activities or provide their students with practice on the usage, teachers who regularly
work on their students’ article errors seem to be rather rare. On the other hand, the data
also proves that incorrect use of articles can be a problem and if learners are to strive for
higher proficiency rather than simply being understood, these errors should not be
totally neglected.

I started my study with these questions in mind;

1. How important is it for learners to use articles correctly?

2. Can Japanese learners attain a high level of accuracy in their use of articles?

3. Are there any effective and systematic ways to learn articles?

4. What can Japanese learners do to improve their understanding of the concept of
   articles, and their skill in using them?

The findings from the study led me to these answers to the above questions.

1. How important is it for learners to use articles correctly?

   The survey indicates that while article errors may interfere with meaning, the impact
   is seldom serious enough to cause communication failure, which demonstrates that
   learners can perform in a reasonably comprehensible way without using articles
correctly. However, confusing errors and overuse of incorrect articles affect the
quality of learners’ performance and the effectiveness of communication due to the
lack of clarity. Therefore, article errors should not be slighted even though they are
not as critical as some other errors.
2. Can Japanese learners attain high accuracy in their use of articles?

Yes, but conscious effort and exposure are required. Also, good guidance is the key to faster improvement or acquisition. In most cases, there may be a certain limitation for Japanese learners in this area as with any other aspects of the language. It is unrealistic to think that any non-native speaker will be able to learn to use a second language without any mistakes in any situation and the lack of an equivalent concept in Japanese to the English article will likely exacerbate the difficulties of this area for Japanese learners. However, I believe that it is possible to reduce article errors that are typically made by Japanese learners through focused learning. Studies such as that carried out by Master (“The Effect of Systematic Instruction on Learning the English Article Systems” in Perspectives on Pedagogical Grammar, 1994) prove the effectiveness of focused instruction. Moreover, I would like to believe that it is possible for advanced learners to attain a level of competence where people hardly notice their article errors. Of course, to achieve this, an incredible effort will be required, and obviously many other aspects of the language will need to be improved as well.

3. Are there any effective and systematic ways to learn articles?

Yes. There are ways to work on articles, have a better understanding of them and learn to use them better. I must admit, however, that ‘the best’ way to do it probably does not exist because all learners are different and their learning contexts
and goals vary.

4. What can Japanese learners do to improve their understanding of their concept and skill in using articles?

I will discuss this in the later chapters, *Teaching Implications* and *Possible Classroom Activities*.

It is important to bear in mind that the purpose of learning the system of articles is not to strive to memorize all the rules and exceptions, hoping to use them perfectly all at once, but to deepen understanding of the system so that the knowledge will help learners perform better and more effectively using the language in the situations they come across. Step by step, through their own experiences, they will learn to use articles better if they continue to make an effort. Being aware of the system and function of articles, they will have some guidelines to sort out their confusion and attain higher proficiency in the language.

As a way of showing some examples of a systematic approach to teaching articles, I will present two charts for determining articles, which were adapted from Master (1990) and Brender (1989) and rules with examples to work with them. I can confidently state that studying the system and rules made a clear difference in my understanding and I believe many will find it helpful and practical as well. Furthermore, there is no doubt that it is useful for teachers to know some clear rules so that we will be
able to guide our students to further progress in their language learning. I am certain that there are many learners who would benefit from focused learning in this area and their developed skills should serve them well in their future studies and the pursuit of their goals.
2. The Investigation

In this chapter, I will describe the investigation in detail. As I mentioned earlier, I carried out a survey on how articles are taught and how they are conceived. After making two questionnaires, I asked teachers who are currently teaching in Japan to answer the questions. In the next two sub-sections, firstly I will explain how the survey was carried out and what the purposes were. Then I will present the actual questionnaire I distributed and the answers given. Finally I will analyze the results. At the end of this chapter, I will state the insights I gained from the survey.

2.1 Questionnaire 1

This questionnaire was given to both native speaking and Japanese teachers who teach different levels of students at various schools in Japan. I was able to collect answers from twenty people in total including twelve teachers who are native speakers and eight Japanese teachers. Their teaching experience varied from two years to thirty years, but on average most of them had about ten years experience. The objectives of this questionnaire were to find out;

1. How teachers in Japan teach articles to their students

2. What practical ideas there are to teach articles

3. How much articles are focused on in Japanese learners’ process of learning English

4. What the viewpoints of the teachers are pertaining to Japanese students’ incorrect
The following are the questionnaire and the summary of the answers given.

Questionnaire 1
Your nationality: American (10) British (2) Japanese (8)
Your native language: English (12) Japanese (8)
Your students' level: Basic(5) Elementary(13) Pre-intermediate(14)
                        Intermediate(14) Advanced (9)
Your students' age group: Children(2) Junior high(4) High school(5)
                          College(8) Adults(7)
Your experience in teaching: 2-30 years

If you teach different levels, please choose one of the levels you teach most. If you do not teach so many levels and could answer for each level you teach, that would be greatly appreciated. Please specify the level(s) in your answer. (Basic, Elementary, Pre-intermediate, Intermediate Advanced)

1. a) Do you teach how to use articles (a, an, the, some, no article)?

   Yes (16) but not as a target of the lesson/when making error corrections/to some extent (8)
            on request (3)
            in grammar class (1)
            especially in the beginning level (1)

   No (4)

   b) Do you correct your students when they make an article error?
Yes (13) but depends on the focus/activity (6)
in their writing (4)
after the activity (1)
frequently (1)
whenever students make a mistake in grammar class (1)
when students especially want to be corrected (1)

Sometimes (5) in their writing (2)
when felt students should know the rules (1)
Not in particular (2)

c) How do you correct these errors?

By explaining (6)
By correcting their writing (4)
By bringing their attention to the errors they make (4)
By making (unobtrusive) corrections orally (3)
By having students rephrase their sentence using the correct article (2)
By having students repeat the correct sentences (2)
By giving more examples of that article (2)
By repeating the sentence with stress on the incorrect article (1)
By repeating the sentence with a sound to indicate there is a word missing (1)
By explaining and providing students with practice to learn the usage (1)
By reminding them if it frequently occurs (1)

d) If you do not correct the errors, why not?

Because of the focus of the lesson (fluency/accuracy, content/minor errors, grammar class/reading or speaking class) (9)
Because of the size of the class being too big (1)

2. What mistakes do your students make when they use articles?

Deletion (15)
Distinction between ‘particular’ and ‘general’ (9)
Misuse of definite article (used in front of proper nouns) (4)
Misuse of Singular/plural (4)
Overuse of incorrect articles (put in unnecessary articles, inconsistent errors) (3)
Overuse of definite article instead of the others (2)
Confusion between a and an (2)
Confusion between articles and possessives (ex. I want to buy my house someday.)

3. What activities have you used successfully to teach articles? Could you suggest one or two?

Drills (e.g. countable/uncountable noun drills from texts)
Listening drills (distinction between a and an)
Written homework (highlight the mistakes and discuss with/explain to the students)
Drawing pictures on the board using proper articles (e.g. There is a tree. Under the tree, there are four flowers. By the flowers there is a dog. etc.)

Conscious awareness activity (e.g. Students hold a number of pieces of paper with a, an or the written on each. As they speak, if they make a mistake, they could be given another piece of paper with that article on it or one piece of paper could be taken away.)

Game (e.g. using cards to distinct a and an)
A guessing game (e.g. What is it? Answer in sentence form)
Use objects (e.g. singular/plural nouns)

List making (e.g. What I want in my home, what I want for Christmas etc.)

Give lists and have students practice (e.g. Ss will copy the list and then practice, such as the names of rivers)

Give handouts and explain it to students

Have students self-correct (e.g. using fingers and showing them something is missing)

Have students correct sentences that contain article errors after going over the rules

Have students make exercises (tests) on articles for another student to complete

Comparative reading (a passage/paragraph/sentence with articles and without articles and discuss the differences in meaning)

4. How important do you think correct use of articles is for students at your class's language level?

Not important (5)
Important in some cases (ex. writing, speeches, professional needs, grammar class, children, students at higher levels) (9)

Important (2)
Important at all levels (3) for college students (1)
Articles should be mastered in lower levels (1)
In the beginning levels, students should practice ‘correctly’ before habits are formed (1)

The survey shows that teachers teach articles in different ways and have various opinions on the importance of the correct use of articles. It seems that most teachers try to teach articles in whatever activity they do by correcting their students’ errors or explaining in class rather than teach lessons which focus solely on the use of articles. Consistent or focused study on articles in classrooms does not seem to be done in most cases. One of the most interesting points was that teachers’ viewpoints on the importance of the correct use of articles at their students’ level vary. This means that students’ learning and their experience in classrooms is affected strongly by their teachers’ beliefs and opinions. Some teachers believe that accurate use of articles should be focused on when students get to higher levels and others believe it should be done earlier. Some believe it is not important to use articles accurately and others find it important to correct their students’ article errors so that they will learn to use them correctly. Since we cannot always predict which student will continue to study English or will be required to have especially accurate English, the decision on how much time and energy we spend on this area is made rather in a self-constituted way. Although
many teachers believe that the correct use of articles is important to some extent, it does not seem to be regarded as one of the most important points of language learning. Thus enthusiasm to focus on the correct use of articles is not seen in most classrooms in Japan. Nevertheless, people wrote about some interesting and practical ideas that worked with their students. I will compile those activities in the chapter of Possible Classroom Activities.

2.2 Questionnaire 2

This questionnaire was completed only by native speakers. The objectives of this questionnaire were to find out;

1. How much the incorrect use of articles affects people’s understanding

2. Whether article errors are conceived differently if native speakers read them rather than if they just hear them

3. Whether/When native speakers think incorrect use of articles is a problem

I removed all the articles from a passage of prose and asked some questions. The questionnaire and the answers are as follows.

Questionnaire 2
Your nationality American (13) British (5) Canadian (2)

Please read the following and answer the questions.
Old woman remembered swan she had bought many years ago in Shanghai for foolish sum. This bird, boasted market vender, was once duck that stretched its neck in hopes of becoming goose, and now look!—it is too beautiful to eat.

Then woman and swan sailed across ocean many thousands of li wide, stretching their necks toward America. On her journey she cooed to swan: “In America I will have daughter just like me. But over there nobody will say her worth is measured by loudness of her husband’s belch. Over there nobody will look down on her, because I will make her speak perfect American English. And over there she will always be too full to swallow any sorrow! She will know my meaning, because I will give her this swan-creature that became more than what was hoped for.”

But when she arrived in new country, immigration officials pulled her swan away from her, leaving woman fluttering her arms and with only one swan feather for memory. And then she had to fill out many forms she forgot why she had come and what she had left behind.

Now woman was old. And she had daughter who grew up speaking only English and swallowing more Coca-Cola than sorrow. For long time now woman had wanted to give her daughter single swan feather and tell her, “This feather may look worthless, but it comes from afar and carries with it all my good intentions.” And she waited, year after year, for day she could tell her daughter this in perfect American English.
1. Does this make sense to you? Is the passage above clear to you?

Yes (13)
Only sometimes (1)
Can understand, but needed to concentrate harder/reread (3)
Yes and no (1)
No (2)

2. Do you think reading the above with articles (a, an, the, some) would make any difference to your understanding?

Yes (4)
Yes, but only a little (1)
No (7)
No, but easier/more smooth to read with articles (8)

3. a) If someone (a native speaker) read this to you, would you notice that articles are not properly used?

Yes (17)
Perhaps (may sound stylized) (1)
No (1)
Not answered (1)

b) Do you think your understanding of the above passages would be different if you read it on a piece of paper rather than if someone read it to you?

Yes (6)  Reading on the paper is easier (3)
Understanding aurally is easier (3)
No (5)   Depends on how it is read (2)
Don’t know (1)
Not answered clearly (5)
4. Do you think articles play an important role to understand what people wrote or said?

Yes (12)

Yes, but mildly (1)

Sometimes (2)

Not really (3)

No (2)

5. When do you think incorrect use of articles can be a problem?

When interferes with meaning (8)

When trying to describe a specific item over a general one (e.g. A train will be here at 7. vs The train will be here at 7. Please sit in the chair. vs Please sit in a chair.) (4)

Formal/official situations (i.e. interviews, speeches, work-related things) (2)

When speaker/writer hopes to perform with high proficiency (2)

In academia (2)

When overused incorrectly (2)

With critical information (2)

When a number of nouns referred to is unclear (2)

When one consistently ignores articles (1)

Misuse is always a problem (1)

Words that are not separated appropriately with articles (1)

Presentations/public speaking (1)

Especially when the noun or following word could be a verb (1)

Can’t think of anything in particular (1)

Don’t think it would be a problem (1)

If there is no ambiguity, no problem (1)

The results of this questionnaire suggest that people have different levels of tolerance for incorrect use of articles and their expectations or attitudes towards non-native speakers’ (their students’) performance differ. A few people argued that the chances of ESL/EFL learners mastering the article system are near zero. It was interesting that
some people mentioned that since this passage was written by a Chinese writer or the character was Chinese, the misuse of articles did not bother them or was not important in this context. Since I did not mention especially that I had removed all the articles from this survey, some people thought this was the original passage. It seems that the incorrect use of articles does not always cause a significant problem unless it interferes with the meaning one is trying to convey. Some people do not expect non-native speakers to use the language perfectly and therefore are more tolerant with article mistakes. However, it can be stressful or confusing for the listener or reader to decipher what the speaker or writer is saying if there are too many article errors. It clearly affects the quality of performance and those errors should not be totally neglected. One thing I had been feeling which was confirmed in this questionnaire was that people generally notice any error made whether it is written or spoken, but depending on how it is presented, it can be more noticeable or less noticeable. This means that if the listener or reader is more focused on content which is captivating, the errors made can be less important. At the same time, even when the content is good, people may immediately lose interest or be easily distracted if there are too many errors. Once again, we need to be aware that both the parts and the whole are important in the language. It is important to improve the quality of the language used to convey the content more effectively, but we also need to consider the quality of the content. Worrying overly about small errors which do not radically affect the content may itself have a negative
impact on the effectiveness of the communication.

In both questionnaires nationalities do not seem to matter. People have different opinions or beliefs about learning or teaching English and this can affect teaching in any area of the language. Since teachers teach what they believe is important for their students, students will have different kinds of exposure and experience in their learning depending on their teacher. After all, no one can say beyond question what is the best way to learn a language and there is no absolute way to teach a language. However, if we are to help our students develop their skills in English, it seems to me that it is important for us teachers to keep studying and reflecting on what works best with our students in the areas where our students need help or guidance. As the survey shows, articles may not be a crucial aspect for all learners to master, but articles have an important function in the system of language and it is an area where Japanese learners clearly need some guidance.
3. Review of the Literature

*A, an, and the* are commonly recognized as articles. Depending on which author you read, however, there are said to be 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 or 7 articles. \{(a, the); (a, an, the); \(a(n), \text{the, zero}\);} and all the way up to \{(a(n), the, some, any, zero, null)\} Before comparing a few authors’ theories, I will explain what function articles have in the system of the language.

Articles are core determiners (See Chart 1). Articles quantify the noun phrase.

In other words, they describe the quantity or size of a set of something. For example, if we say just *cake*, it gives us an abstract notion of something sweet we eat, but the idea becomes concrete when it is specified by determiners.

For example,

A cake
The cake
Each cake
Some cake
My cake
A lot of cakes
This piece of cake
Those pieces of cake etc.

There are three types of determiners; predeterminers, core determiners and postdeterminers. They come before the head noun in the order as seen in Chart 1. It is said that the upper limit on total number of determiners seems to be three.

**Chart 1** (adapted from Collins p. 1)
The order of determiners in a noun phrase is explained by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman. (p.335)
Determiners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>predeterminers</th>
<th>core determiners</th>
<th>postdeterminers</th>
<th>head noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>all</td>
<td>the</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>those</td>
<td></td>
<td>a lot of</td>
<td>flowers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>my</td>
<td></td>
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<td>once</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Core determiners are mutually exclusive and only one can be present at a time. For instance, we can say my cake, a cake or the cake, but we cannot say the my cake, or my a cake.

**Core determiners: (adapted from Collins p. 1)**
1. articles (*a, an, the, no articles*)
2. possessives (*e.g. my, their, Jack's*)
3. demonstrative (*this, that, these, those*)
4. assertive/nonassertive (*some and any*)
5. negative (*no*)
6. universal (*each and every*)
7. dual (*either and neither*)
8. Wh-determiners (*what, which, and whose*)

Articles always come before nouns or noun phrases. If there are any adjectives or postdeterminers, these come after the article but before the noun. If there is any predeterminer in a sentence, this comes before the article.

For example,

* A book
The book
An interesting book
The two thick books we bought last summer for the course
A place where we can have a nice dinner without a reservation
The wonderful time we had in Brattleboro
All the other teachers

As we can see from the above, it is simpler and easier not to include some, any or zero and null articles in the article category. According to a study by Peter Master,

"The Effect of Systematic Instruction on Learning the English Article System" in Terence, ed. Pedagogical Grammar, where he says in footnote 1 (p.229) 'Although many researchers include unstressed some as a member of the article system, I have restricted the members to these four (a, an, the and no article) so as not to have to consider other mutually exclusive members of the class of central determiners'.

However, according to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, definite the, indefinite a/an, and unstressed some and no article are defined as the English articles (p.271). The following continuum is shown to contrast the zero/null article with a/an and the.

(least definite) zero some a/an the null (most definite)

The zero articles occur with nonspecific or generic noncount and plural nouns (e.g. milk, eggs) And the null articles occur with certain singular count and proper nouns (e.g. lunch, London) The zero article is the most indefinite of English articles, whereas the null article is the most definite. The above continuum clearly shows which article is the most definite and which one is the least definite. There are times when it is possible to
choose from more than two articles depending on what we mean. There is an example in
*The Grammar Book* in use of unstressed *some* and *zero articles*. We can say, *I need*

*some stamps*. or *I need stamps*. The speaker is saying any stamp will do. However, by

having *some* in front of the noun, it imposes a limit on number of stamps needed, even

though the precise number of stamps remains unspecified. It seems to be useful to know

this concept to give learners an explanation of slight differences in meaning or to help

us understand the meaning of articles more clearly.

Also, to deepen our understanding of the use of articles further, the authors

explain as follows. The *zero article* seems to alternate with the indefinite article in

several contexts where the *zero article* is more general and the indefinite article more

individuated:

1. *Zero* signals noncount, and *a/an* signals count:

   The boy ate *(a)* chicken.

2. *Zero* signals general, and *a/an* particular:

   He sells *(a)* cheese of uncommon flavor.

3. *Zero* signals abstract, and *a/an* concrete:

   *(A)* Prison dehumanizes its inmates.

The *null article* seems to alternate with the definite article in three contexts with slightly

different meanings being expressed (Master 1997):

1. *Null article* names, and *the* describes.
Mr. Phillips was appointed (the) treasurer.

2. *Null article* is vague, while *the* is focused.

   It usually snows here in (the) winter.

4. *Null article* is familiar, while *the* is less familiar.

   *(The)* Lunch was quite uneventful.

   *(Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman p.280-p.281)*

As it is shown, although there are different definitions on articles and each theory gives good points, I will focus on *a, an, the* and *no article* in this thesis. It seems to me that in everyday teaching, we do not necessarily have to confuse students by adding different definitions of articles or giving unnecessary information all at once. By including *any, some, zero* and *null* to the list, I can imagine more confusion in students’ learning. It is important for us teachers to understand why certain articles are used in different situations or contexts and what kind of theories are discussed with regards to their use. However, I think the most reasonably simplified way of presenting will best serve my students. Students often do not need to know everything about articles, but some will be interested in the use of articles as some questions arise. When necessary, it will be helpful to provide them with a clear explanation of the form, meaning and use within our knowledge and experience.

In summary, articles are defined as follows.

- Articles are *a, an, the* and *no article* (*zero, null*).
• Articles always come before the noun or noun phrase.

• Articles come or are omitted before postdeterminers such as cardinal numbers (1, 2, 3), ordinal numbers (first, second, third) general ordinals (next, last, another), quantifiers (many, (a) few, (a) little, more, most, less, least) phrasal quantifiers (a lot of, a great number of etc).

• Articles come or are omitted after predeterminers such as quantifiers (all, both, half) multipliers (double, twice, three times) fractions (such a, what a).

• Articles come before adjectives.

• Like all other aspects of the language, NO RULES about articles ARE ABSOLUTE.
4. Charts for determining articles and categories with examples

In this chapter, I will present two charts for determining articles. One is a chart adapted from “Teaching the English Articles as a Binary System”. It is quite a practical asset for learners to know when they have trouble determining which article to use. In the first sub-section, I will explain what the binary system is and present summarized aspects of the system and its advantages and disadvantages. In the second sub-section, I will present a chart I adapted from Brender (1989) and give examples for some important and useful categories for teaching. The reasons why I think his chart is practical are that:

1. We can move from one step to another, or we can skip some steps and just look at the ones we would like to focus on.

2. It gives clear rules and is simple to follow.

3. It gives an overall picture to see that some system actually exits.

4. It seems manageable for learners to study and learn how to use articles correctly with a framework.

Although we must be aware of exceptions and no rules are absolute, I believe the rules shown in the book, ‘Three Little Words, A, An, The’ by Brender guide us to a better understanding of articles. Further, these rules will help non-native speakers improve their ability to use articles more accurately in a shorter period of time rather than by trying to learn through analysis of individual examples in the contexts they appear, or by trying to acquire them ‘naturally’ by exposure. In any case, learners need to apply the rules to their own contexts to be fully able to use articles.

4.1 The Binary System
The term ‘binary system’ refers to the fact that articles have two primary functions: to classify or to identify a noun. Classifying a noun indicates whether the noun is a member of a group or class of like others. Asking *What is this?* usually prompts a classifying response. Identifying a noun shows that the noun has been singled out, and asking *Which X is this?* usually prompts an identifying response.

(Collins 2002) For example, *What is this? It’s a dictionary. Which one is this? It’s the dictionary that I brought from the teachers’ room.* Master (1990) reminds us, however, the classifying question *What’s this?* could also elicit an identifying response in the real world. (e.g. *It’s the key you accused me of stealing./It’s the remains of the steak you’ve been broiling for the last half hour.*) Nonetheless, he continues that students should be able to understand the difference between the two. For example, the teacher could say pointing to a student: *How would you classify this person? (She’s a student.) How would you identify this person? (She’s the student with the red hat. /It’s Joan.*) To teach this system effectively, teachers should go through some steps for their students to understand each entry of the chart.
The following is a list of summarized aspects of classification and identification adapted from Master (1990) by Collins (Sandanona 2002).

Summarized Aspects of Classification and Identification-Adapted from Master, 1990 by Collins (p.6)

Classification (a, no article)
- Countable/noncountable
  a girl/information
- First Mention
  Once there was a girl...

Identification (the)
- Subsequent Mention
  Once there was a girl. The girl...
- Ranking Adjectives
  1. Superlative (ranking on a vertical scale)
     Whales are the largest mammals.
  2. Sequence (ranking on a horizontal scale)
     (e.g. the first, the second, the following, the next)
     John was the last person in line.
  3. Unique (nouns of which there is only one example)
     (e.g. the same, the only, the one, the main, the whole)
     Chang and Eng Bunker were the original Siamese twins.
- Shared Knowledge
  1. Universal (every person on the Earth can identify)
     (e.g. the sun, the moon, the earth, the ground)
     Look up in the sky! It's a bat.
  2. Regional/Local Shared Knowledge
     (every person in a certain region or location can identify)
     (e.g. the city, the beach, the mountains, the lake, the office, the airport)
     I'm going to the post office. (the one I usually go to)
  3. Immediate Knowledge (items known or presumed to be in the immediate environment of the listener/reader)
     (e.g. the floor, the door, the blackboard, the refrigerator)
     Could you answer the phone? The muffler is loud. (referring to a
The advantages of this system are;

1. The chart is quite simple and easy to follow if students have sufficient knowledge/input and competence in dealing with the entries in the chart.

2. It provides a framework in which *a/no article* have one clear role and *the* has another.

3. If the teacher can guide his/her students through clear instructions or experiential learning over a certain period of time, students may eventually learn to use the concept of the chart effectively to sort out their confusion by themselves.

The disadvantages of this system are;

1. Students may have problems with the first entry-classification and identification. To distinguish one from the other, they need to know some rules clearly. They may have difficulty dealing with the chart at the very first stage.
2. Teachers need to provide well-thought out plans to guide their students. Depending on the level of the students, it may not be easy to go from one step to the next.

3. The chart or system does not provide enough information on exceptions and other rules such as when a noun has a preceding determiner, or on the distinction between common nouns and proper nouns.

Considering the above, I think it might be easier to work with the chart adapted from Brender (1989). Although it looks more complicated than the one adapted from Master, it seems more tangible to go from one step to another and be more flexible in respect to which part we focus and work on.

4.2 A chart adapted from Brender (1989) and some useful categories for teaching

In addition to the reasons I mentioned above, Brender’s chart seems to be most suitable for Japanese learners because it was written with Japanese learners in mind and it seems to me that each step gives good examples to clarify confusion that is common among Japanese learners. Of all the rules, I will focus on some of the most important categories that are crucial to understand the basic function of English articles from his chart and add some categories that were shown by Collins (Sandanona 2002).

Many rules have to be learned ‘as they are’, however, the rules I will focus on probably need to be taught somehow in the process of students’ learning. Basically, I quoted the rules and explanation from the book; however, I added some grammatical description from another book and my own examples as well. I will present the chart I adapted below and some of the important steps (Shown in bold letters)
and categories with examples will follow.
Step 1: What is a noun?

A noun is the name of a thing, a person, an animal, a place, an idea, an activity etc. We have a name for everything that is commonly recognized, such as apple, basketball, pine, dolphin etc. We also categorize certain things and give the category a name, for example, fruit, sport, tree, mammal etc. Also, to describe activities, gerunds are used to make noun forms such as, cooking, cleaning, swimming.

Step 2: What is the difference between common nouns and proper nouns?

A proper noun is the name for a particular thing, person, or place. Proper nouns all begin with a capital letter and most proper nouns do not require articles. A common noun is the name for a general thing; place etc and we need to choose which articles to use (a, an, the or no article) before that.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proper nouns</th>
<th>Common nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Bond</td>
<td>man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super Hotel</td>
<td>hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todaiji Temple</td>
<td>temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eilean Donan Castle</td>
<td>castle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 3: What are singular nouns? What are plural nouns?

In English, it is important to know the concept of singular and plural. A noun can be singular when it is one, or when it is uncountable. When a noun is plural, it means two or more. We can specify the number by putting it before nouns (e.g. 7 pens) or use some quantifier, such as many, a few (e.g. many pens, a few pens). Plural nouns end in ‘s’, (‘es’) but there are some irregular plural nouns, such as men,
mice, feet, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a pen</td>
<td>pens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a church</td>
<td>churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an umbrella</td>
<td>umbrellas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a man</td>
<td>men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a foot</td>
<td>feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see in the above chart, some nouns are countable and others are uncountable. Uncountable nouns have no plural forms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uncountable</th>
<th>Countable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>water/—</td>
<td>a tomato/tomatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ice/—</td>
<td>an ice cube/ice cubes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge/—</td>
<td>a horse/horses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ink/—</td>
<td>a pet/pets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>snow/—</td>
<td>an angel/angels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>traffic/—</td>
<td>a cookie/cookies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are nouns that are used as both uncountable and countable. For example, paper, coffee, chocolate, cheese etc. We need to see the meaning of the word from context.

Step 4: First mention /Subsequent mention

After a noun is mentioned once, the article the is used subsequently, as illustrated in the following example.

Long ago, there lived an old man in a small hut. The old man had a big tree outside the hut. One day he saw a boy climbing the tree.

Step 5: Specificity

If there is no previous mention of the nouns, we need to determine whether the speaker has something
specific in mind.

**Shared knowledge**

Immediate shared knowledge

When the speaker/writer is talking about items known or presumed to be in the immediate environment of the listener/reader.

Two people are in their office. One of them says;
Gee, the floor is so clean! They must have had a cleaning job done. (It is obvious which floor the person is talking about.)

On the back of a ‘GODIVA’ coffee bag it says;
Reseal the bag as tightly as possible and store in the freezer to ensure coffee of exceptional quality, cup after cup. (It is the bag the reader is holding and reading which is referred to, and the freezer in the house of the reader.)

A woman is talking to her friend and says;
I was so busy this morning. After I did the laundry, I cleaned the house. Then I worked in the garden. (She is clearly talking about things around her house.)

Regional/Local shared knowledge

When every person in a certain region or location can identify that which is referred to, we use the; for example, the city, the mountains, the office, the airport, the supermarket etc. Often these are locations customarily or habitually visited.

I have to go to the post office after class. (i.e. the post office which I usually visit)
We need to be at the airport by 9:00. (the airport closest to my house, or most commonly visited)

Universal

When every person on the Earth can identify that which is referred to, we use the; for example, the sun, the sky, the moon, the earth, the ground, the land and the sea. Those are part of our immediately visible
environment.

Look at the moon! It’s so beautiful tonight. We had great weather while we were there. The sun was shining, and the sky was blue. It was just perfect!

Although there is only one sun, moon or sky, they can appear different at various times. When we talk about a different aspect of the sun, the sky, or the moon, we use an indefinite article and say a pale sun, a hot sun, a cloudy sky, a blue sky, a full moon etc.

The sky is usually singular, but sometimes a plural form is used poetically or in prose, such as blue skies, threatening skies.

Also, used as a proper noun, 'Earth' as 'Mother Earth' may be used poetically.

### Limiting postmodification

When we have words that limit what we are talking about in the sentence, we use the.

The book on my desk should be removed. The food in this supermarket is very fresh. The store across from Jusco is now having a sale.

### Ranking Adjectives

Superlative adjectives (ranking on a vertical scale)

When we use the superlative form, the is always used.

This is the best sandwich I have ever had in my whole life! I think math is the most difficult subject. Tokyo is the biggest city in Japan.

Sequence (ranking on a horizontal scale)
When we talk about sequence, for instance, the first, the second, the following, the next, the last.

He is the last person I would want to see in this whole world!
You are the first person who asked me the question.
I will enclose the following. (In a letter)

Unique (the same, the only, the one, the main, the whole)

When there is only one example, the is used.

Sebastian and his twin sister Viola were as alike as two raindrops. They had the same light brown hair, bright blue eyes and winning smiles. (Twelfth Night)
Tell me the whole story very slowly right from the start.
Which one is your teacher? The one with a beard sitting by the window.
You are the only person I can trust.

One of a kind

When there is only one possibility that is referred to in context, the is used.

The director decided to hire a new teacher for this year’s program. (There is only one director in the department of the school.)
A director from the Nara YMCA gave a speech at an annual YMCA directors’ meeting. (There are many directors in the meeting. He is one of them.)
The manager of the store came out and spoke to me. (There is only one manager in the store.)
A manager of a store was interested in renting the building. (This manager is one of the many who own a store.)

Step 6: Representative nouns

We use a singular noun with the to represent an entire group at times. It seems these cases are often seen in written form or formal speeches.

The pen is mightier than the sword. (a proverb)
The history of the piano is an interesting one. (the entire class of pianos)

We use a, an, or the if the sentence can mean either the general class or any particular one.
An elephant is a large animal. (any elephant)
The elephant is a large animal. (the entire class)
A coyote can live almost anywhere. (any coyote)
The coyote can live almost anywhere. (the entire class)

Step 7: To indicate the best/the correct

Sometimes the is used to indicate that something is the best or the most correct. Some vocal stress is required in these examples.

You are going to New York? You ought to go to Broadway. It is the place to go.
Daimaru is the department store to buy things with high quality.

We use the to say something is correct and it is the only way to do correctly.

That’s not the answer for this question. The answer is B.
That’s the way to do it.

When we use a, it suggests there are other possibilities.

That is a solution to the problem. (More than two solutions are possible)
That is a way to do it. (There are other ways to do it.)
There is always a best way of doing everything. –Ralph Waldo Emerson

Step 8: Some Ailments

There are some ailments that require the before the name. However, it seems there are times when the is omitted. There are other ailments which are preceded by a/an or no articles.

I have the flu.
(the) mumps (the) chickenpox (the) measles
the sniffles the bends the plague
gout hives

Step 11: When another determiner is used

There are words which can replace an article before a singular noun. These are referred to as
determiners. For singular nouns determiners such as *this, that, any, some, no, every, each, either, neither, possessive pronouns, possessive proper nouns* are used.

I don’t want *any food* now.
There is *no milk* in the fridge.
I go to work by car *every day.*
*My computer* was pretty old.
*Mary’s car* is outside.
Could I have *some water,* please?
Which do you like better, *this painting* or *that painting* over there?

**Either**

When we choose between two equal people or things, we use *either.*

*Either dictionary* will do.
There are two beds in the room. You can use *either one.*

However, when we have a choice between two different kinds of things or people, we use *the* after *either.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>either</th>
<th>the</th>
<th>noun 1</th>
<th>or</th>
<th>the</th>
<th>noun 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Either the English-English dictionary* or *the English-Japanese dictionary* will do.
You can talk to *either the woman* or *the man* over there.

**Neither**

When two equal choices are unacceptable, we use *neither.* *No article* is used with singular nouns.

*Neither dictionary* will do.
*Neither car* is available.
*Neither hotel* has a room for us.

When two unequal choices are unacceptable, then we use the word *neither* followed by *the.*

The first noun is preceded by *neither* and the second by *nor.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>neither</th>
<th>the</th>
<th>noun 1</th>
<th>nor</th>
<th>the</th>
<th>noun 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Neither the English-English dictionary nor the English-Japanese dictionary* will do.
*Neither the hotel nor the B&B* has a room for us.
Any

The word *any* is used to mean, “it doesn’t matter which one.” When we use *any*, the article is omitted before the noun.

Which dictionary do you need? *Any dictionary* will do.  
*Any bookstore* will have the book. It’s a bestseller.  

Some

The word *some* is used with a singular noun, it shows the person or thing is not important.  

*Some guy* told me about it a long time ago. (It is not important who he is.) 
My friend and I went into *some store* and bought something to eat there. (I don’t remember the name of the shop. It wasn’t important. ) 

We can also use *some* to indicate a small indefinite amount. 

I put *some milk* in the porridge.  
Susie went out to get *some ice cream*. 

No

We use *no* to show that someone or something does not exist or no longer exists. 

We have *no butter* in the fridge. 
They had *no money* to spend on luxuries. 
The school had *no teacher* to teach the course.

Step 12: When some possessives are used

Possessives

We use the possessive form *’s* to show something or someone belongs to a person, an animal or some kind of group. However, when something belongs to a thing or a place, we usually use the word *of* to show possession. 

Look! *The window of the house* is broken. (not the house’s window is broken.)
Compare this word order when a person is the possessor.

**Tony’s house** has a broken window.

**The man’s house** has a broken window.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Possessor</th>
<th>Possession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The</td>
<td>window</td>
<td>of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With places or things *of* is not used to show possession. Instead, the possessor is treated as an adjective.

The form ‘s is not used in this case.

Let’s talk in the **meeting room**.

**The store manager** came out and told us that they didn’t have what we wanted.

When plural possessive proper nouns are used with a singular noun, we usually need to use *the* before the noun.

**The Adamsons’ house** was built near the sea.

**The Nakamuras’ yacht** was sold for a much higher price than they had expected.

When the emphasis is not on the relationship, an indefinite article can be used.

Do you have a **pet**? (rather than *Do you have your pet?*)
Does he have a wife? (not Does he have his wife?)

Step 13: Before uncountables

A large category of nouns are uncountable or have uncountable forms. These nouns include: mass nouns, aggregates, nouns naming qualities, emotions, activities or forces, generic nouns, and nouns naming bodies of knowledge. Generally, uncountable nouns are not preceded by an indefinite article (a or an). They can, however, be preceded by the. They generally do not have plural forms. Some of these words could take (phrasal) quantifiers such as (a) little, some, a lot of, a great deal of etc.

Mass nouns

Water, snow, butter, tea, oil, sand etc. are called mass nouns because we think of them in terms of some unit.

A glass of water/ a drop of water
A grain of sand/ a bucket of sand
A cup of tea/ a pot of tea

We do not ordinarily put a with these nouns, but we can use the if we want to indicate previous mention or specificity.

No article
There was water all over the floor when Mrs. Walters came home.

Subsequent mention
Her favorite rug was soaked by the water.

Specificity
The water in that lake is very dirty.

People use a with a mass noun in everyday speech.

Would you like a beer?
I’d like a coffee, please.
Aggregate nouns

Furniture, food, jewelry, music etc. are aggregates. They represent a collection of different things.

Furniture-tables, chairs, sofas, etc.
Food-vegetable, meat, fruits, etc.
Jewelry-necklaces, rings, earrings, etc.

Sometimes the article *a* is used with an aggregate if we are referring to one of its varieties.

A peach is *a* juicy fruit.
Seaweed is *a* healthy food.

Generally this type of word does not use the article *a*. If we refer to a specific aggregate, we should use *the* or a substitute for it (*i.e.* *that, this, her, his etc.*)

The office furniture is very old.
We sold our furniture when we moved out of our old apartment.

If we are not specific, we do not use articles.

Furniture is expensive.
Noriko’s sister sells nice jewelry.

Qualities

Wisdom, modesty, courage, bravery etc. are nouns that describe the characteristics of people. Usually we do not use the article *a* before these kinds of word.

We look to our leaders for wisdom.
Ignorance is no excuse for breaking the law.

If we specify to whom the characteristics belongs, we use either *the* or another form of determiner, *i.e.*

his.

The ignorance he displayed at the meeting was astounding.
His wisdom was sought by many.

Emotions

Happiness, laughter, cheerfulness, sadness, anger etc. are nouns that describe the emotions or feelings of
people. We do not usually use the article a before these kinds of words.

I heard laughter from his classroom. 
**Sadness** filled the room when we heard the news.

If we specify to whom the emotion belongs, we use either the or another determiner, i.e. *his* etc.

**His cheerfulness** brightened the room. 
**The bride’s happiness** was contagious and everyone felt happy.

**Activities**

Work, knitting, golf, eating, tennis etc. are nouns that refer to activities, things people do. Usually we do not put a before these words.

Many people play tennis.  
Mineko enjoys knitting.  
I just finished work.

Some of these nouns have more than one meaning. Baseball, for example, can refer to either the game (activity) or to the ball which is used in the game.

He likes to play baseball.  
(the game; an activity)

He went to a baseball game last summer.  
(a single event)

He threw a baseball to me.  
(a ball used in baseball)

**Forces**

Luck, peace, light, thunder, snow, war etc. are forces that affect people’s lives. Usually we do not use the article a before these words.

I heard thunder last night.  
There is light at the end of the tunnel.  
**Luck** is coming my way.

There are times when the article a can be used with some of these words.

**A light snow** covered the ground as we went to church.  
**A heavy rain** soaked us to the skin.
My friend couldn’t take the trip because a war had broken out in the country.

**Generic nouns**

Nature, mankind, business, society, technology etc. are singular nouns that represent a number of people or an aspect of human activity. They are usually not preceded by the article *a*.

**Technology** advances greatly year by year.

**Nature** has its own way to combat **pollution**,

Sometimes we can use a noun both **generically** and **quantitatively**

**Business** is bad right now.

(generic-business in general)

My friend’s husband started a **business** this year.

(quantitative-one business)

**Famine** spread throughout West Africa several years ago

(generic-famine in general)

The eastern part of Bangladesh suffered a **serious famine** years ago.

(quantitative- one famine)

Some generic words cannot be used in a quantitative manner. They can only be used generically.

**Propaganda**

**Mankind**

**Nature**

We can, however, show specificity with many generic nouns.

**The technology of Japan** is very advanced.

**The management of Fuji, Inc.** faces serious labor problems.

Often we use generic nouns with other nouns. Then the article *a* can be used.

A business meeting

A technology breakthrough

A labor movement

**Bodies of knowledge**

Grammar, poetry, journalism, history etc. are nouns that describe bodies of knowledge. They generally are not preceded by the article *a*.

My brother studies **history**.
I enjoy poetry.
Studying grammar is very interesting.

In some cases, the article *a* is used if we refer to one aspect of a body of knowledge.

The university requires students to study a foreign language.
(one language among many)

Mr. Perkins wrote a history of the early American people.
(one of many history books on his subject)

Step 23: Specificity

Read these sentences.

The employees in Hideyuki’s office work late every night.
The leaves on that tree are changing color.
The windows in the old man’s house are dirty.

*The* is used before each of the plural nouns in bold-faced type because they are specific (post-modifiers).

Now, look at this sentence.

Please clean the tables.

In this case, both the speaker and listener know which tables are being referred to (Shared knowledge); probably all the tables which are in a certain room or area.

In addition to showing specificity by using *the*, there is a second kind of specificity that is often necessary with plural nouns.

We cannot say;
I saw boys.
It would be better to say;
I saw two/some/many/a group of etc. boys.

Of course, if both the speaker and the listener know which boys the speaker is talking about, then the speaker should say:
I saw the boys.

Any additional mention of the boys should also preceded by *the* unless the pronoun is used.

**Subsequent mention**

I saw several boys in the garden.

Two of the boys were climbing a tree, and one was digging a hole.

**Pronoun**

I saw several boys in the garden.

They were playing with a frog.

If we want to indicate that some, but not all members of a group did something, the words *of the* are usually used with a quantifying expression.

Three of the boys went home.

(This indicates that others stayed.)

The three boys went home.

(This means there were only three boys and all went home.)

Some of the children began to cry.

(but not all)

Most of the employees were on holiday last week.

(but not all)

A few of the files have been lost.

(Most of the files have not been lost.)

With plural possessive common nouns *the* is generally used before the possessive noun.

The boys' hats

The Children’s books

If we want to specify a certain number (but not the entire number) when using a plural noun with a possessive, we usually do it in the following way, using *of the*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Possessive Noun</th>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Rest of sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Three of the boys’ children’s hats were blown away by the wind. Some books were damaged by the rain.

When a possessive pronoun is used in this kind of construction, no article is usually used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning of the sentence</th>
<th>Number of</th>
<th>Possessive Noun</th>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Rest of sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The farmer found</td>
<td>three</td>
<td>his pigs</td>
<td>near the river.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The workers felt that</td>
<td>most</td>
<td>their efforts</td>
<td>were wasted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can say:

**The boy’s three books** were lost,
If we mean he only has three and he has lost all of them.

However, if the boy has many books, and he lost only three books, we must say:

The boy lost **three of his books**.

Step 24: After the phrases either of/neither of/each of/ none of/ all of/both of/most of/some of

**Either of**

If we want to select between two equal people or things, you use the phrase *either of* and the article *the*.

**Either of the books** will do.

**Either of the students** may have done it.

There is not much difference in meaning between *either of the books* and *either book*.

However, if we choose to use the plural form of the noun (books), then we must use *of the* after *either*.

If we use the singular form of the noun (book), we use *either*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plural noun</th>
<th>Singular noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>either of the books</td>
<td>either book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shops</td>
<td>shop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Neither of**
If we have two choices and we do not like or accept either choice, we can use the term *neither*. As with *either*, if we use a plural noun, we must follow *neither* with *of* and the article *the*.

**Neither of the students** lives in Nara.
**Neither of the shops** has what I want.

Or

**Neither student** lives in Nara.
**Neither shop** has what I want.

If we want to emphasize the individuals of a group, we use the term *each*. As with *either* and *neither*, we must use *of* and the article *the* if we decide to use a plural noun. With a singular noun simply use *each*.

**Plural noun**
Each of the students was given an oral test.
Each of the teachers has a plan for the course.

**Singular noun**
Each student was given an oral test.
Each teacher has a plan for the course.

**None of**

*None of* is used to emphasize that no person, place or thing is excluded. The article *the* is needed after *of*.

**None of the classrooms** was open.
**None of the students** wanted homework.

A singular noun cannot be used with *none*.

**All/All of**

If we want to include every person or every object, we use the term *all* or *all of*.

**All the students** were late for class.
I talked to **all the students** about their presentation.
All the classrooms were used at that time.
All of the students were late for class.
I talked to all of the students about their presentation.
All of the classrooms were used at that time.

According to Swan (1995), before a noun with a determiner (for example the, my, this) all and all of are both possible. American English usually uses all of.

She's eaten all (of) the cake.
All (of) my friends like riding.

Before a noun with no determiner, we do not normally use of.

All children can be difficult. (Not all of children)

Sometimes all is used with plural nouns without using an article. This is especially true of written commands.

All students must take the exam.
All packages are to be inspected.

The article can also be omitted in sentences where you refer to a totality rather than to units of a group.

All large cities have crime problems. (no exceptions)
All the cities of Japan are very crowded. (no exceptions limited in Japan)
All rats carry disease. (no exceptions)
All the rats in that laboratory were killed by a strange disease. (only the rats in the laboratory are included.)

Both/both of

When we refer to two equal people or things, we use the term both or both of.

Both TVs are broken.
Both rooms are empty.
Both the boys came to my house.
Both the girls in the room were wearing red dresses.
According to Swan (1995), before a noun with a determiner (e.g. the, my, these), both and both of are both possible. In American English, both of is usual.

She's eaten both (of) the chops.
Both (of) my parents like riding.
Both (of) these oranges are bad.

We often drop the or a possessive after both.

She's eaten both chops.
He lost both parents when he was a child.

Most of

*Most of* followed by the article *the* and a plural noun is used to mean nearly all, but not all, items or people in a specific grouping.

Most of the rooms are used in the morning.
Most of the students did homework.

*Most* without an article followed by a plural noun is used when nearly all the objects, animals or people are being referred to in a general manner.

Most people have a computer at home.
Most bakeries sell French bread.

Some of

*Some* is used to indicate more than a few but less than most. Usually we use *of* followed by the article *the* when we refer to people or items in a specific grouping.

Some of the books were useful.
Some of the students couldn’t come to the party.

As with *most*, we can use *some* without an article to refer to people or items in general.

Some tourists enjoy visiting temples and shrines.
Some restaurants do not take credit cards.
Sometimes the article *the* is replaced in these expressions with a possessive pronoun or proper noun.

In these cases usually the word *of* is used.

We didn’t accept either of Mr. Kitano’s offers.  
Neither of Mr. Kitano’s offers was acceptable.

If we use a common possessive noun with these expressions, we usually need to use the article *the*.

We can accept either of the boss’s offers.  
*Neither of the teacher’s ideas* was practical.

None  
Some  
**Most** of the teachers had to work that day.  
All  
Both

*The* in these expressions can be replaced with plural determiners, (*i.e.* these, those)

We can accept either of these offers.  
*Neither of these* ideas is practical.  
*Each of those* rooms has to be cleaned perfectly by next Monday.

None  
Some  
**Most** of those students are waiting for you.  
All  
Both

In the following chapter entitled *Teaching Implications* and *Possible Classroom Activities*, I will present some ideas and actual activities we can use in class for teaching usage of the articles I discussed here.
5. Teaching Implications

In this chapter, I will discuss what we need to be aware of with regards to acquisition of articles and present some ideas and suggestions to teach Japanese learners how to use articles more accurately.

One great point about teaching articles is that we are working on them all the time no matter what aspect of the language we are teaching in class. Without even focusing on them, learners should be constantly getting input and producing output with articles. However, if we are to focus specifically on articles to clear up our students’ confusion, it is essential to teach their use with a context, and the form, meaning and use should be focused on together. Also, long-term instruction should be expected in order to integrate the system into learners’ skills gradually but steadily as they make progress. As I presented in the previous chapters, there is a complicated process to go through for non-native learners to determine which article to use in each situation, further complicated by the fact that they are actively trying to use other aspects of the language as well, and learners’ confusion and mistakes are inevitable in the course of their learning process.

It seems to me that some stages exist in learning a certain language item from new input to competence in actual output.

No awareness of language item

- Recognize the rule/part of the language item but do not understand
- Understand the concept to some extent, but not fully, still confused
- Understand the concept as input, but not able to use actively as output
- Capable of using as input and output with some errors
Capable of using as input and output accurately

(I am aware that there may be more stages to acquisition in given cases.)

Sometimes learners are able to move from the first stage to the last one easily and not much effort is required. Nevertheless, in most cases, learners go back and forth in their learning process since we do not keep focusing on one point and there is always new information coming in. When learners come across exceptions, when they cannot apply the rules they know to the situation, that is when confusion and frustration arise. They thought they had learned enough, but suddenly there is another exception or new rule to learn! Perhaps we all understand their feelings of frustration and abandonment (helplessness). However, if certain rules are taught at each stage effectively, learners’ errors out of confusion will be reduced. Some research (Master 1994) proves that focused instruction shows positive results and leads to significant improvement in learners’ skills. I believe there is a clear difference in result according to how learners are taught as well as how they learned.

Taking account of the above, I tried to summarize some simple points we can practice in everyday teaching. Although it is challenging to address the issue of articles among the many and varied items which arise in a language class while attempting to accommodate the learning preferences of individual students, it should be possible to impact positively upon each stage of a students’ acquisition of articles. It seems sensible to avoid sudden concentrated effort which may overwhelm the students with the prospect of a seemingly impossible task.

I think the following points will be useful to help learners improve their skills in using articles
and in any other aspects of the language. Since there are different learning styles and various goals for each learner, it is important to be aware of the difference and what learners need at each stage of their progress. After all, the teacher who teaches the class knows his/her students best and he/she needs to make good judgment on what leads his/her students to further progress in language learning and incorporate useful skill development into his/her class. As we practice teaching, I think we learn how to teach better as well and each of us has to find our best way in teaching our students.

Practical ideas to help our students improve their ability/skill to use articles

In a classroom

1. Expose learners to authentic use of articles

It is important for learners to see/hear articles in some context, such as dialogues, paragraphs, articles or stories etc. Since which article to use depends largely on the context, learners need to be exposed to many good examples in use to learn from, rather than just learning the form and meaning or doing grammar exercises which do not provide enough/natural contexts. Students may not understand authentic materials fully at the beginning, but they do not get very far when they are only working with some materials they are able to manage easily. Although it has to be 'doable', we need to choose something that gives enough challenge and some authentic language experience. If we present some steps for students to understand the material, students will learn to handle it and gradually build up their confidence. Working with only simple texts, textbooks or activities does not seem to motivate most students and thus we need to think of ways for students to enjoy using the language. Also, it is
impossible for students to have enough exposure only in the classroom and they need to find ways to expose themselves to the target language outside the classroom as well if they hope to reach higher proficiency.

I will present one example that was successful with my high pre-intermediate/intermediate students for this purpose. The focus was not to study articles, but to enjoy reading authentic material and try to express themselves creatively following an example.

The material: I am…. (From Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul)

Procedure: Firstly, we tried to brainstorm what we can say after ‘I am’. Then, I introduced the poem to the class. After reading and appreciating the poem, students tried to make their own. (My detailed lesson plan is attached at the end with a complete poem and students’ poems: the Appendix 2, 3 and 4)

Here is part of the poem.

I am….

I am an architect: I’ve built a solid foundation; and each year I go to that school I add another floor of wisdom and knowledge.

I am a sculptor: I’ve shaped my morals and philosophies according to the clay of right and wrong.

I am a painter: With each new idea I express, I paint a new hue in the world’s multitude of colors.

I am a scientist: Each day that passes by, I gather new data, make important observations, and experiment with new concepts and ideas.

I am an astrologist: reading and analyzing the palms of life and each new person I encounter.

I am an astronaut: constantly exploring and broadening my horizons.

I am a doctor: I heal those who turn to me for consultation and advice, and I bring out the vitality in those who seem lifeless. (It continues, but it is omitted)

Most important I am me.
My students seemed to enjoy the activity and I think they learned a lot through the steps in the process. Of course they did not understand the poem as native speakers do, but they were able to read the poem and write their own poems. Each poem told the class a lot about themselves and it was interesting for me as well as the students. As they wrote their own poems, they had to try to use articles correctly. They were able to express themselves freely as well as practice the use of articles in context. Of course, none of them learned to use articles perfectly by way of this single experience and their final production may not have been as accurate and smooth as a native speaker's. However, at least they tried to use their ability, knowledge and creativity actively and learned some things from their experience. Besides, I know some of them were trying extremely hard to use articles and other aspects of the language correctly in context and I believe that to apply their knowledge to the context and be creative with the language is an important skill to learn and use.

There are easier poems or quotations available in books, magazines, on the internet and sometimes in textbooks. In the Appendix, I will list some titles I have used or I think may work with students. (the Appendix 5)

2. Have access to correct use of articles

As it is inevitable to learn through trial and error, students should be encouraged to try and learn from mistakes. However, if they do not know what is correct or why it is incorrect, it is difficult for them to improve their skills. Teachers need to think of some ways to provide learners with correct usage such as rephrasing students’ errors, asking them to clarify, showing good examples, giving some materials to
help them improve their understanding /accuracy in the usage. For example, if students do not use
singular/plural nouns correctly and always make errors, the teacher could think of ways to help them
with the problem. Students might say something like, *I like apple.* or *I bought flower.* Then the
teacher could rephrase the sentence correctly (*You like apples.*) explaining why if necessary. The teacher
might ask students to clarify (*Did you buy a flower or (some) flowers?*), provide some exercises so that
students can clearly see what the correct forms are, or make a handout that helps students understand
why a certain article is used in the context. For example, the handout may look like this;

Today I went shopping and ..... (With a picture of one flower) I bought (       ) flower.
(With a picture of three flowers) I bought (       ) flowers.
(With a picture of multiple flowers) I bought (       ).

In the above exercise, we may need to explain how to use quantifying expressions such as
*a few, some, a lot of* and the reasons why we use these. (Obviously if the number of flowers bought
is not important, or flowers are sold as a bunch, we usually do not specify the number of flowers
bought in a context as above, but we have to put a determiner before a countable noun.)

3. *Provide learners with practice that will help them learn the rules and apply them.*

Although it is not easy to work on each article error our students make, we can focus on some common
errors or useful rules to apply in context to assist our students. A lot of recurring or confusing errors
come from a lack of understanding or awareness. Through experiential learning, many learners learn to
use them more consciously or at least become more aware of the usage. For example, a student might
say something like, *Today I went to the Osaka city for shopping and bought the new shirt.* The student is
probably not fully aware of the use of articles for common/ proper nouns and first mention/subsequent
mention. By practicing using the correct article with context, students will learn to use articles more consciously and accurately. Once sufficient time has been spent on the usage of a particular article, the teacher may not wish to correct each mistake the students make. Of course, most students will need more than one experience to fully understand the usage and learn to use it correctly, but at least students can reflect on their experience and try to use what they learned more actively. Perhaps the teacher could just try to remind students of the usage of article after some time spent on a particular usage and have them learn to self-correct. Some activities for these problems are mentioned in the later chapter.

4. **Encourage students to learn chunks of language (groups of words that have a meaning) rather than individual words.**

It is more practical to learn chunks of language, for example, *make a profit of ¥100,000, have a good time, at the end of this month* rather than learning the word *profit* as a new item of vocabulary or looking at the words separately, *have, a, good, and time or at, the, end, and of*. It is hard work for students to build up sentences on their own if they do not know or have not practiced enough structures or vocabulary. Actually using these sentences correctly is even more challenging. In all four skills, students perform better when they know meaningful groups of words.

5. **Point out some important use of articles in the context, such as idiomatic expressions, useful rules to remember while teaching lessons**

Students are often unaware of useful rules or what idiomatic expressions mean. By explaining those rules or idioms in the context they are working on, they tend to retain more. Some rules are quite simple and once students learn them, they will
hardly ever make mistakes with them. If students come across some idiomatic expressions while they are reading something or learning a dialogue, it is useful to remember them as they are. For example,

*My grandmother has a heart of gold and everybody loves her. I didn’t have an umbrella and when I got home, I was soaked to the skin.*

Outside the classroom

1. **Recommendation of good reference books**

Introducing students to where to look to reinforce their skills will be helpful. Any grammar book will help them in this purpose, but if the teacher is able to recommend a few of the best ones for the students, they will probably benefit more from the materials. A chart I adapted from Brender (1989), a chart by Brender (1989), or Master (1990) may be helpful to refer to when they have a problem, looking at the part they want or need to work on. A list of reference books, which I think are useful for teachers or students is presented as follows.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of the book</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The Article Book</td>
<td>Tom Cole</td>
<td>The University of Michigan Press</td>
<td>High elementary and above *Accompanying software for IBM and Mac-'Fish Trek'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Three Little Words</td>
<td>Elizabeth Claire</td>
<td>Delta Systems Co., Inc.</td>
<td>High elementary and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Understanding and Using English Grammar</td>
<td>Betty Schrampfer Azar</td>
<td>Prentice Hall Regents</td>
<td>High pre-intermediate and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Practical English Usage</td>
<td>Michael Swan</td>
<td>Oxford University Press</td>
<td>Intermediate and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. English Grammar in Use</td>
<td>Raymond Murphy</td>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>High pre-intermediate and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Basic Grammar in Use</td>
<td>Raymond Murphy</td>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>Elementary and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The Good Grammar Book</td>
<td>Michael Swan Catherine Walter</td>
<td>Oxford</td>
<td>High elementary and above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To teach/learn the use of articles thoroughly, I recommend 1, 2 and 3. Other books contain a section which may also be useful for some purposes. Elementary level students will need help from their teachers with the above books. With lower level students, the teacher should be able to make handouts for his/her students using some ideas derived from exercises in the books. It may be even more helpful to make activities from the exercises so that students can learn more easily through their own experience in using the aspect of the language in context.

2. Effective use of dictionaries

I often come across students who do not know how to use dictionaries effectively, especially those who
are at the beginning level. It seems that they do not know where to look or what to reference or how to check things with their dictionary. Perhaps instructions on how to use a dictionary would be valuable for these students. For example, it is a practical skill to know how to find out what part of speech a language item is, how to read phonetic signs, how to find the most suitable definition for the word used in a situation they are looking at, whether the language item is an idiomatic expression, and so on. As for use of articles, it is very useful to find out whether a noun is uncountable or countable, singular or plural, or to see different example sentences of the noun with articles. It makes an enormous difference when learners are able to check different sources and think of or find answers on their own. I would certainly recommend that students at the elementary level or higher use a learners’ English-English dictionary. These dictionaries are graded according to level and students can choose according to their ability.

3. **Writing**

Writing is a wonderful way to practice output. When speaking, students can often get by, using the language less accurately than when writing because others help them, people understand them from context and they can use gestures and other ways to make themselves understood. However, in writing, students need to think more carefully about their choice of words, sentence structures, the flow of the language, and small details. They are required to use the language they learned in sentences and paragraphs. By doing this, they can express themselves using what they learned more actively and experiment with whether they can actually use the language efficiently. Writing gives them an
opportunity to actually use the language in context. Also, writing clearly shows students’ linguistic ability, making it easier for teachers to see in what area their students need help. If teachers can read what their students wrote, whether it is a journal, summary or paper, and work with students’ errors, it can be a great help for the students. It seems writing practice works better when students are able to do some work around a topic area which is closely related to them. Furthermore, when teacher’s comments are more personalized, perhaps responding to the content or congratulating them on some good expressions they used, it appears to motivate more students to write. When it becomes entirely a language accuracy focused task, many of them do not seem to enjoy it as much or cannot be motivated. When we make some suggestions about their errors, we could focus on a few things students can work on. In this way it is easier for students to internalize and for teachers to write more focused explanations of why they were incorrect. If we decide to collect students’ work and present it as a class book, it would be a good idea to edit it so that students can be proud of their accomplishment and keep it as a record of their own improvement.

4. **Reading**

Reading is a great way to experience and learn many good examples in authentic materials. Students can learn the natural use of articles and other aspects of the language in context. They can see the flow of the language, from words to phrases, to sentences, to paragraphs and to passages. Also, the content will help them have interest in what they are doing rather than simply studying many sentences without any context or background. By constantly reading passages written by native speakers, they can develop
a feeling for articles. They can try to use what they learned from reading; using certain patterns, vocabulary, phrases or sentences in their own speeches or writing. In this way, their English will sound and look more natural and understandable than in instances where they try to make sentences on their own from scratch. When students’ level is high, it is less difficult to recommend books written in English. It is, however, challenging for beginners and even higher level students to read on their own or choose what to read. Perhaps teachers could introduce something short, such as quotations, poems, children’s’ stories to start with in class, gradually allowing students to enjoy reading on their own. In the Appendix, I will introduce some books I have used which worked well with my students and add some more that were effectively used by other teachers. (the Appendix 6)

5. **Listening**

Since students often cannot clearly identify articles used in speech, it is difficult for them to learn how to use articles correctly only by having listening input. Dictation is a helpful way for students to improve their listening. Cloze-type exercise give them a clear overall picture of the language used and show them what they are not hearing. When they see what they did not hear and why they did not hear it, the experience will help them know what to work on. For example, we might make a cloze exercise from a listening activity from a textbook. The following is an example of a cloze exercise from a textbook, *New Interchange 2*.

Man 1: Creative Rentals.  Good morning.
Woman:  Hello.  I’m calling about ____ _______ you have ____ _____.
Man 1:  Yes. What can I tell you about it?
Woman: Where is it, exactly?
Man 1: It's ______ ________, just off ______ ________.
Woman: Oh, near ______ ________. Can you hear ______ ________?
Man 1: Yes, I'm afraid you do hear ________. But ______ ________ has lots of space. It has ____ bedrooms and ______ ________ ________ ________ ________.
Woman: I see. And is it in ______ ______ ________?
Man 1: Well, ______ ________ is about ______ ________ ________.
Woman: Uh—huh. Well, I'll think about it.
Man 1: O.K. Thanks for calling.
Woman: Thank you. Bye.

The actual dialogue is:

Man 1: Creative Rentals. Good morning.
Woman: Hello. I'm calling about the apartment you have for rent.
Man 1: Yes. What can I tell you about it?
Woman: Where is it, exactly?
Man 1: It's on King Street just off the freeway.
Woman: Oh, near the freeway. Can you hear the traffic?
Man 1: Yes, I'm afraid you do hear some. But the apartment has lots of space. It has three bedrooms and a very large living room.
Woman: I see. And is it in a new building?
Man 1: Well, the building is about fifty years old.
Woman: Uh—huh. Well, I'll think about it.
Man 1: O.K. Thanks for calling.
Woman: Thank you. Bye.

Since articles are not pronounced clearly in usual speech, students often cannot identify them. Linked sounds, weak forms or any other change of the sound in spoken sentences confuse students. And as people usually listen for the 'gist' of a dialogue instead of trying to identify every single word, they are not usually focused on article usage in sentences. Since they do not hear what they expect (words pronounced clearly), they misinterpret or do not understand what is said. In other words, they may understand the dialogue and be able to retell the story quite accurately, but forget to put articles in if
they are careless or did not hear them, for example, ‘The woman called to ask about apartment. or ’ The
apartment is near freeway.’ By doing this activity, students can compare what they thought they heard
and what was actually said. When students tell others what they heard orally, they often delete articles
and are not aware of it. Having them write omitted words in blank spaces, they will clearly see what
they missed or misheard and be more aware of the existence and use of articles in sentences. We might
also look closely at the use of articles after finishing this activity and see why a certain article is used in
each part of the dialogue helping students understand that language aspect more deeply for their future
benefit.

It is crucial for teachers to know what activities help a given level of students. Sometimes it is difficult
for us to choose materials for certain students or our choice of materials do not work well with some
students. Teaching is indeed trial and error. We must remember that we are also learners and need to
make constant effort to be better at what we are doing.
6. Possible Classroom Activities

In this chapter, I will compile some of the useful activities that were suggested in the survey I carried out, in addition to some other ideas by my teachers, classmates, colleagues and myself. As I discussed in the previous chapter, no matter what we do as an activity in class, articles will be used. If we are to actually teach the use of articles, however, other language items in the activity should be easy for students to handle so that students will be able to focus on the articles. In the next section, I will categorize some ideas for activities according to article usage and methods of error correction. We might also consider using some of these activities to teach other language items along with article usage without concentrating specifically on the use of articles. I will present all the activities in the following format:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of article usage/Method of error correction</th>
<th>Name of activity</th>
<th>Source of activity</th>
<th>Purpose of activity</th>
<th>Class level/Age group/Size of class</th>
<th>Material needed</th>
<th>Steps of activity/ What to do</th>
<th>Possible follow-up/Alternatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

As for the source of activity, I tried to write the name of the person I received the idea from. However, I added my ideas and explanations to the original ideas or adapted them with my students in mind. The following is a summary of this chapter.

**Summary of the chapter**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Level/Age group</th>
<th>Size of class</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Drawing on the board</td>
<td>Basic-Elementary/Any age group</td>
<td>More effective with small group (up to about 10 students)</td>
<td>20-25 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Using rods</td>
<td>Basic-Pre-Intermediate/Any age group</td>
<td>More effective with smaller groups (up to about 20 students)</td>
<td>20-30 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Magazine/Catalog pictures that lend description</td>
<td>Elementary and above/Any age group</td>
<td>Any class size</td>
<td>15-20 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Memory table</td>
<td>Basic-Elementary/Any age group</td>
<td>About 4-10 students</td>
<td>15 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Bag of gifts</td>
<td>Basic-Elementary/Any age group</td>
<td>About 8-15 students</td>
<td>10-15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Supermarket and dept. store flyer</td>
<td>Elementary and Above/College students and adults</td>
<td>Any class size</td>
<td>20 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section 2 Activities for common nouns and proper nouns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Level/Age group</th>
<th>Size of class</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Categorizing nouns</td>
<td>Basic and above/Any age group</td>
<td>About 2-20 students</td>
<td>15 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Nouns in a passage</td>
<td>Basic and above/Any age group</td>
<td>Up to about 20 students</td>
<td>20 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section 3 Activities for countables/uncountables or singular/plurals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Level/Age group</th>
<th>Size of class</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Using pictures of food and drink</td>
<td>Basic-Elementary/Any age group</td>
<td>Up to about 10 students</td>
<td>20 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section 4 Activities for ranking adjectives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Level/Age group</th>
<th>Size of class</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Funny questions Questionnaire</td>
<td>Low pre-intermediate and above/Any age group</td>
<td>About up to 20 students</td>
<td>25 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Section 5 Activities for shared knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Level/Age group</th>
<th>Size of class</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Giving directions</td>
<td>Pre-intermediate and above/ Any age group</td>
<td>Any class size</td>
<td>30 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Instruction activity</td>
<td>Elementary and Above/ Any age group</td>
<td>Up to about 20 students</td>
<td>25 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section 6 Activities for generic noun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Level/Age group</th>
<th>Size of class</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Giving definitions</td>
<td>High Elementary and above/ Any age group</td>
<td>Up to about 15 students</td>
<td>15 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section 7 Activities for distinction between a and an

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Level/Age group</th>
<th>Size of class</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Fly swatters</td>
<td>Basic-Low Elementary/ Young learners</td>
<td>More than 4 students</td>
<td>About 10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Karuta game</td>
<td>Basic-Elementary/ Any age group</td>
<td>About 6-40 students</td>
<td>15 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section 8 Activities for conscious awareness of the use of articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Level/Age group</th>
<th>Size of class</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1 Modified cloze activities</td>
<td>Pre-intermediate and above/ College students and adults</td>
<td>Any class size</td>
<td>25 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section 9 Activities for analyzing the use of articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Level/Age group</th>
<th>Size of class</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.1 Article analysis using cartoons</td>
<td>Advanced (Linguistics class)/ College students and adults</td>
<td>2-30 students</td>
<td>20 minutes or more (depends on the amount of material used)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section 10 Activities for correcting article errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Level/Age group</th>
<th>Size of class</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
### Section 11 Ideas for other activities for articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Level/Age group</th>
<th>Size of class</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.1 Newspaper headlines</td>
<td>Intermediate and above/ Adults</td>
<td>4-15 students</td>
<td>30 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.2 Creative stories</td>
<td>High Elementary and above/ Any age group</td>
<td>4-20 students</td>
<td>30 minutes or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section 1 Activities for first/subsequent mention

**Name:** Drawing on the board  
**Source:** Elka Todeva (A professor at The School for International Training)  
**Purpose:** This activity can be used to introduce/practice how to use first and subsequent mention.  
**Level/Age/Size of class:** Basic-Elementary /Any age group/More effective in smaller groups  
**Materials:** Blackboard and chalk  
**Time:** 20-25 minutes or more  
**Steps:**

1. Draw a tree on the board and say, ‘There is a big tree.’ Have students repeat the sentence. Then draw a bench under the tree and say, ‘Under the tree there is a bench.’ Students repeat. Then draw a cat on the bench and say, ‘What do you see now?’ Students answer ‘On the bench there is a cat.’ Ask a student to come up to the board and draw something to add to the picture. After the student draws something, the class will say what they see in the picture. Then ask another student to draw something. The class describes what the student drew. Ask another student to draw something else.

2. After sufficient oral practice, write the first sentence on the board, ’There is a big tree.’ and elicit other sentences from students. The sentences should look like this on the board.
There is a big tree. Under the tree there is a bench. On the bench there is a cat. Behind the tree there is a fence. In the sky there are some clouds etc.

3. Have students think about why the articles are as they are and check to see if they come up with correct answers.

**Possible follow-up:** Students work in pairs or in small groups. They go through the same process and create a picture. After pairwork or group work, they share their picture by describing what they did to the whole group. In this activity, in order for the students to be prepared, the teacher should tell them that they will be asked to describe their picture to the class.

**Name:** Using rods

**Source:** Introduced by Thomas Santos in class at The School for International Training, 2001/ Partly summarized in the handout of "The Art of Articling: Pedagogical Approach" by Collins (Sandanona 2002)

**Purpose:** We can use this activity to give our students practice after they have learned about first/subsequent mention and shared knowledge.

**Level/Age /Size of class:** Basic-Pre-intermediate/Any age group/More effective in smaller groups (perhaps up to about 20 students)

**Materials:** Rods

**Time:** 20-30 minutes or more

**Steps:**

1. Tell students to sit in a circle so that everyone can see the rods that will be used to make a story.

   Students should be close enough to the teacher to participate in the activity. If there are many students, the teacher can ask some students to sit in an inner circle to participate in the activity and others behind the circle to observe.

   T: (Makes a square using 4 rods.) Once there was a castle.
   T hands a rod to Student #1 and says Princess.
   S1: (Puts the rod in the castle) In the castle there lived a princess.
T hands a rod to Student #2 and says Dragon.
S2: (Puts the rod near the castle) The princess was guarded by a dragon.
T hands a rod to Student #3 and says Roof.
S3: (Puts the rod on the square) Once the princess went onto the roof.
T hands a Student #4 and says Bird.
S4: (Puts the rod on roof) A golden bird flew down and landed beside the princess etc.

Additional Comments:

The teacher must supply words that are logical given the story that is developing. The teacher should say some words that will be immediate shared knowledge such as the roof (obviously we know it is the roof of the castle) and some that will just be first mention (castle) or even subsequent mention castle (later in the story) After the story, the teacher should go over the story again emphasizing the change in use of articles.

Possible follow-up: Students reconstruct the story using rods in smaller groups, or students can retell the story drawing simple pictures (such as stick figures). After that, they could write the story using suitable articles.

Name: Magazine/catalog pictures that lend to description
Source: Elizabeth Tannenbaum (A professor at The School for International Training)
Purpose: Students can practice using first mention/subsequent mention by working with visuals.
Level/Age /Size of class: Elementary and above/ Any age group/ Size does not matter if you have enough materials
Materials: Magazine pictures or catalogs
Time: 15-20 minutes or more
Steps:

1. Tell students that they are going to look at pictures in magazines or catalogs and talk about them. Show students examples orally by writing patterns on the board. For example, I see a/an X. The X is _____. ‘ Or ‘I’m looking for a dress. I like the ___
blue dress on page ‘_____’.

2. Students work in pairs or small groups following the patterns and try to describe the pictures they see or give their opinions about the pictures/products they see in catalogs.

3. After practice, students report briefly what their partners said.

Possible follow-up/Alternatives: Practice comparatives. The blue dress on page 6 is more expensive than the red dress (one) on page 9. I like the blue dress better than the red one.

Name: Memory table
Source: Elizabeth Tannenbaum
Purpose: Students practice the use of a/an and shift from first mention to subsequent mention through a game-like activity.
Level/Age/Size of class: Basic-Elementary /Any age group/4-10 students
Materials: Some objects such as a pencil, an apple, a cup etc. (Only one of each item)
Time: 15 minutes or more
Steps:

1. Place objects on a table and have students look at them for 30 seconds.

2. Remove or hide the objects. Ask students a question, such as What did you see? Students should answer in a sentence. Have one student answer at a time. I saw a pencil. Then ask, Who else saw the pencil? Another student might say, I saw the pencil. or I didn’t see the pencil. Make sure students answer with correct articles.

3. After the activity, the teacher asks students what they got right or did not get right. For example, students may answer, I got the pencil, but didn’t get the apple. etc.

Possible follow-up/Alternatives: A similar activity using a video. The teacher shows an extract of a video, then gives students a task such as What kind of food did you see in the scene? Then students
might say, *I saw some apples on the table. I saw some bananas next to the apples. I didn’t see any apples.* etc. Or the teacher might prepare a handout with questions such as, *What kind of things did you see in this person's room?* On the sheet, the teacher has written some names of objects and students should mark the ones they see. Then students answer; for example, *I saw a bed. This person has many books in his room.* With this activity, students need to use the rule of ‘shared knowledge.’

**Name:** Bag of gifts  
**Source:** Elizabeth Tannenbaum (Adapted by Kayo Fujita)  
**Purpose:** Students practice using *a/an* and *the* in an imaginary situation such as ‘at Christmas’.  
**Level/Age/Size of class:** Basic-Elementary/Any age group/8-15 students  
**Materials:** Different objects as gifts in a bag (the same number as students)  
**Time:** 10 minutes  
**Steps:**

1. Teacher tells the students that each person will receive a gift. Everyone pulls an item out of the bag.

2. Students make sentences such as, *I’ve got a pen. Look, Tom got a game. I wanted the game.* etc.

**Name:** Supermarket and dept. store flyer  
**Source:** Elizabeth Tannenbaum  
**Purpose:** Students practice the use of *a/an* and *the*, giving information, opinions or comments on the goods/products they see in pictures.  
**Level/Age/Size of class:** Elementary and above/College students and older/The size does not matter if there is enough material and the teacher can go around the room.  
**Materials:** Supermarket and/or department flyers (enough for each group/pair) Probably flyers in English from other countries are more interesting for students.  
**Time:** 20 minutes or more  
**Steps:**

1. Divide students into small groups and give each group a flyer.
2. Give a clear example orally or by writing a model dialog on the board.

Example:

A: “I’m looking for a pot.”
B: ”The pots are on the second page/on the back page etc.”
A: “Look. These are on sale. How about this one?”
B: “I think it is too expensive.” etc.

3. Students check the information on the flyers and practice giving information or making comments.

Before they start, give them a task such as gathering information to report about the product/goods they were most interested in, liked least, thought was strange etc

4. Students report to the class and the teacher makes the necessary corrections.

Section 2 Activities for common nouns and proper nouns

Name: Categorizing nouns
Source: Kayo Fujita
Purpose: Students learn what proper nouns/ common nouns are.
Level/Age/Size of class: Basic and above/Any age group/2-20 students
Materials: Cards with common or proper nouns written on each (enough for each group), two signs to categorize the cards under ‘Proper’ and ‘Common’. (enough for each group), one set of big cards to put on the board, blackboard, scotch tape
Time: 15 minutes or more
Steps:

1. Make cards with different nouns on each before class. For example, ‘city’, ‘Paris’ ‘Prime Minister’ ‘Junichiro Koizumi’ etc.

2. Before starting the activity, go over the rule of common/proper with students. Give them a few clear examples. For example, ‘Paris’ is a proper noun, but ‘city’ is a common noun. Elicit other examples from students. Divide students in pairs or small groups if the number of students is big.
3. Give each pair or group cards and have students divide them into 2 groups; common nouns and proper nouns.

4. After they work in small groups, the teacher gives prepared cards for the board to the students. The students attach the cards to the board under the correct category.

5. The teacher checks students’ categorization by going over each one. If students are confused, explain why it goes under the relevant category or have students explain.

6. After students have a clear idea on what proper and common nouns are, ask students questions, such as Who is Koizumi? What is a “pear”? Students answer in a sentence using correct articles. He is the Prime Minister of Japan. It’s a (kind of) fruit. The teacher may need to alternate questions according to their students’ level.

Additional comments:

Students may not able to answer the questions in step 6 accurately, but at least they will hear accurate sentences from the teacher and learn the usage of articles with proper/common nouns.

Name:  Nouns in a Passage
Source: Adapted from Three Little Words, A, An, The by Brender
Purpose: Students will learn to find nouns in a passage or dialogue and identify whether they are common or proper. Also, they will learn that proper nouns do not usually take an article.
Level/Age/Size of class: Basic and above/Any age group/up to about 20 students
Materials: A passage/dialogue at the students’ level (enough copies for all the students)
Time: 20 minutes or more
Steps:

1. Prepare a fairly easy passage or dialogue for students to read.

2. Go over the rule for common/proper nouns if necessary.
3. Students work in pairs or small groups and underline all the nouns with articles and discuss whether the noun is common or proper.

4. Students come up to the board and write the nouns under the category of common or proper. Each pair or group should write their own categories and the whole class will compare answers and check.

   Or the teacher could go over each one with the whole group orally and check. Point out that proper nouns are usually not preceded by a/an or the.

5. Work on their pronunciation and intonation, especially focusing on the weak form of the, unstressed some or linking sound.

6. Have students read the passage/dialogue in pairs or small groups. After they practice, ask each pair/group to read a part (or the whole if it is short).

   Example:
   A: How was your weekend?
   B: It was okay.
   A: What did you do?
   B: Nothing exciting. I just went to Jusco to buy some food. I made pizza for dinner.

Section 3 Activities for countables /uncountables or singular/plurals

Name: Using pictures of food/drink
Source: Kayo Fujita
Purpose: Students learn the concept of singular/plural, countable/uncountable and practice using the language item in context.
Level/Age/Size of class: Basic-Elementary/Any age group/ up to about 10 students
Materials: Picture cards of food and drinks
Time: 20 minutes or more
Steps:
1. Make cards with pictures of food and drink. Flyers from supermarkets are a good source of pictures of vegetables, fruits, and other kinds of food.

2. Go over the vocabulary with the whole group, looking at the pictures. Explain a few examples of both countable and uncountable nouns.

3. Have students divide the cards into 2 categories, countable and uncountable. They may make a few mistakes, but let them try.

4. Go over each item and correct their mistakes if there are any.

5. Give each student some cards (countable/uncountable mixed). Have them work in pairs and ask questions using the cards they have. For example, ‘Do you like ice cream?’ ‘How often do you eat apples etc.?’ ‘Did you eat ice cream this week?’ The level of difficulty in the questions and answers should be controlled by the teacher. The teacher could write sentence patterns under the headings ‘Questions’ ‘Answers’ on the board for the students to use if they are unable to form questions on their own. The teacher should also encourage students to ask follow-up questions (wh-questions, yes/no questions) to each other. Tell the students that they will report about their partners’ answers later, so they should try to remember what their partner said.

6. Have students report things they remember about their partner/classmates. For example, *Calum sometimes eats ice cream. His favorite is strawberry ice cream etc.*
Possible follow-up/Alternatives

After going through the same procedure to categorize the nouns, students play a concentration game.

Make word cards that match picture cards and have students spread them face-down on their desks.

Students try to find matching cards. When they turn over a picture card, they need to make a sentence such as ‘It’s milk’ or ‘They are apples.’ When they turn over a word card, they say something like *I need (a picture of) milk. I need (a picture of) apples.* If the picture and the word did not match, they say, *They don’t match.* Teacher may want to teach the language students might use. Through this activity, students learn vocabulary and also some sentence forms.

**Section 4 Activities for ranking adjectives**

*Name:* Funny Questions Questionnaire

*Source:* Kayo Fujita

*Purpose:* Students will practice using ranking adjectives (the first, second, next, last, most exciting etc) with proper articles and ask questions about themselves.

*Level/Age/Size of class:* Low pre-intermediate and above/Any age group/up to about 20 students

*Materials:* Questionnaire sheet (enough for each student)

*Time:* 25 minutes or more

*Steps:*

1. Make a questionnaire including questions incorporating ranking adjectives before class.

2. Go over the questions with the whole class. Have students ask questions if they do not understand the questions on the sheet.

3. Have students do pairwork or walk around the classroom asking questions to their classmates. The teacher should give students a clear task such as to report three things
they learned that were interesting for them, or to find someone who has ideas most similar to their own etc. so that the activity is meaningful to the students.

Possible questions:

1. Who would be the last person you would ask to ________________?
2. What would be the first food you would like to eat if you came back to Japan after 1 year of studying abroad?
3. What would be the first thing you would do if you came back from a desert island after being shipwrecked?
4. What would be the next step for you after you ________?
5. What is the second most important thing in your life?
6. Would you ever want to work at the same place as your boyfriend/girlfriend/husband/wife/father/mother etc.?
7. What is the smallest thing you own?
8. What is the most expensive thing you have ever bought?
Students can add their own questions to the questionnaire.

Possible follow-up/Alternatives: Students write about one of the questions explaining why they answered in the way they did.

Section 5 Activities for shared knowledge

Name: Giving directions
Source: Kayo Fujita
Purpose: Students can practice giving instructions/directions using correct articles.
Level/Age/Size of class: Pre-intermediate and above/Any age group/Any class size
Materials: Blackboard
Time: 30 minutes or more
Steps:

1. Go over a simple instruction with the whole class; for example, how to get to a well-known place near the school. Teach them sequence words with useful phrases for giving the required instructions.

‘First, go to_____. Then, take a train to ______. After that, ____etc. Write the sentences on the
2. List a few names of places students can easily give directions to following the examples.

3. Have students work in pairs or in small groups and give directions to each other, then writing the
   instructions together. Students may want to choose destinations for themselves.

4. Have the students read their directions or write them on the board for the whole class to hear/read.
   The teacher corrects their errors by rephrasing or writing in correct words.

**Possible follow-up/Alternatives**

Students could practice telling other people how to get to places in their school, how to use some service
in school, how to use a piece of equipment etc..

For example:

- How to borrow a book from the library.
- How to get to the gym on campus
- How to use the washing machine in the laundry room
- How to get to a certain place (e.g. a popular restaurant, a nice shop, a music store etc.) in the city

*Name:* Instruction activity

*Source:* Kayo Fujita

*Purpose:* Students practice the use of articles for first mention/subsequent mention and shared
knowledge.

*Level/Age/Size of class:* Elementary and above/Any age group/up to about 20 students

*Materials:* Blackboard

*Time:* 25 minutes or more

*Steps:*

1. Tell students to stand up and follow instructions. After an initial run-through, it may be necessary to
go over some of the expressions below so that students understand what to do.

*Examples:*
Go to the door.
Pick up the pencil. Which one? The one on the table next to the blue pencil case.
Touch the ceiling.
Pick up a pencil.
Move the chair in front of the blackboard to the corner of the room.
Look into ______’s eyes.
Smile at me.
Look up ‘_____’ in the dictionary.
Count up to 30 really fast. etc.

2. Write the instructions on the board. After practicing with the whole group, divide them into smaller groups or pairs so that they can practice giving instructions to each other.

3. Then have students practice the following form of the sentence. ‘______ told me to go to the door.’
   ‘______ told me to open the door.’ Each student reports to the class two or three things their partner told them to do. They can add more sentences if they are able, such as ‘______ told me to touch the ceiling, but I couldn’t.’ ‘______ told me to smile at him, but I just burst out laughing.’ ‘______ told me to count up to 10 in Spanish and I did!’

Section 6 Activities for generic nouns

Name: Giving definitions
Source: Kayo Fujita
Purpose: Students will practice giving definitions by using proper articles. Students practice defining nouns.
Level/Age /Size of class: High elementary and above/Any age group/up to about 15 students
Materials: Picture/word cards
Time: 15 minutes or more
Steps:
1. Prepare some picture/word cards. It is easier for students if they know the language items for this activity, although it is a great way to learn new vocabulary as well. If word cards are used, students
should be able to read them easily.

2. Show students what to do by giving an example. Ask one student to be a partner and give hints of the card you are holding. For example, 'This is a kind of daily food. I put this on my toast every morning.' Encourage students to answer in a sentence. 'Is it butter?' 'It's butter.'

3. Give students some cards. Tell them not to show their cards to others. Divide them into pairs or small groups.

4. Have students practice giving definitions. They can give hints about the picture/word cards they have. For example, 'It is a kind of fruit we eat in autumn.' This could be whole group work, pair, or small group practice.

**Possible follow-up/Alternatives:**

If it is pairwork, we might also give an information gap activity. As and Bs have different nouns written on their sheet and by asking questions, they fill out the forms. In this activity, words should be new vocabulary or something unusual for the students so that they will be asking questions with some purpose.

Also, when we focus on a cultural topic such as Halloween, we could use this activity after introducing the vocabulary so that students can practice giving definitions and also learn the vocabulary.

**Examples:**
A: What is a witch? B: It's an old woman who can work magic.
A: What is a bat? B: It's a black animal that flies in the sky at night. It lives in a cave.
A: What is a coffin? B: It's a box for vampires to sleep in.

Another way to practice is to have them give hints to other students. Then their partner can guess what it is.

**Examples:**
A: It is an old woman who can work magic. B: It's a witch.
A: It is a black animal that flies in the sky at night. B: It’s a bat.

To make it a team game, the teacher can divide the class into 2 or more teams. On the board, he/she writes the names of the teams. A toy hammer or bell is placed on a table in front of the board. One student from each team comes to the table and listens to the teacher’s question, for example, ‘What is a jack-o-lantern?’ When they know the answer, they pick up the hammer and hit the table to make a sound. The first one to do so can answer the question. If the answer is correct, the student’s team gets a point. Before they do this team game, they need to get enough practice in the sentence structure.

Younger students seem to enjoy this kind of quiz activity.

**Section 7 Activities for sound distinction between a and an**

_Name:_ Fly swatters  
_Source:_ One of the teacher training sessions I participated in  
_Purpose:_ Students will practice determining the correct article for a noun by listening to its sound.  
_Level/Age /Size of class:_ Basic-Low Elementary/Young learners/ more than 4  
_Materials:_ Pictures of flies with _a_ and _an_ on each, fly swatters  
_Time:_ About 10 minutes  

_Steps:_

1. Prepare 2 big pieces of paper with a picture of a fly on them. Write _a_ on one and _an_ on the other. Prepare 2 plastic fly swatters as well.

2. Attach the pieces of paper on the board. Divide the class into 2 teams. The teacher reads a word, for example, “book”. Then one student from each team runs with a fly swatter to the board and hits the fly with the correct article. The team of the student who answered correctly first gets one point and the next two students play.

_Additional comments:_
For younger students, it is a fun and active way to practice sound distinction. Students may get too excited in hitting the board etc. and we need to make sure that they are not too distracted by the nature of the game.

**Name: Karuta game**

**Source:** Suggested by a junior high school teacher in the survey

**Purpose:** To have students practice on the distinction between *a* and *an*.

**Level/Age/Size of class:** Basic-Elementary/ Any age/about 6-40 students

**Time:** 15 minutes or more

**Materials:** *A* cards and *An* cards (Enough for each group), big pieces of paper with words written on them, such as ‘apple’, ‘umbrella’ for the whole group to see during the activity.

**Steps:**

1. Divide the class into groups of 5 or 6 if the group is big. (fewer if necessary) They can put their desks or tables together so that each group has enough room to play this game. In the center of each table, place the *a* and *an* cards.

2. Show a word written on a big piece of paper to the class and read the word. Students see and hear the word and try to grab the card with the correct article.

3. The students with most cards are the winners in each group.

4. Have students say each word with the correct article in choral repetition after the activity. It is more effective to have simple pictures and have them say a sentence for each picture, such as *Its an apple. It's a book. etc.*

**Additional comments:**

It seems to me that students can practice listening without feeling too much pressure this way because they are in small groups.
Name: Modified cloze activities  
Source: The Grammar Book  
Purpose: Students reflect on the usage of articles and practice using the proper articles in context.  
Level/Age/Size of class: Pre-intermediate or above/College students and older/Any size  
Materials: Dialogs, passages, poems etc. (at students’ level) The following example is taken from the Grammar Book. pp.290-291)  
Time: 20 minutes or more  
Steps:  
1. Prepare cloze exercises before class.  
2. If necessary, go over the relevant rules of articles in class before giving the handout to students.  
3. Divide students into pairs or small groups. Give them a time limit and tell them to work together.  
4. Students work in pairs or in small groups and discuss which article to put in the blanks and give reasons for their choices.  
5. After discussion, the teacher goes through the exercise asking each group’s answers.  
Possible follow-up/Alternatives: Students can make tests for their classmates on the usage of articles they learned. (Suggested by Noriko Nishiguchi)  
Modified cloze dialogs such as the following can be used for both teaching and testing purposes (developed by Linda Chan-Rapp). Have students fill in the blanks with a/an or the.  

Son: Hey, Dad, can I have (1)________ car Friday night? I want to take Sally to (2)______ school dance.  
Dad: Well, that depends. Don’t you have (3) ________ paper to write?  
Son: Yeah, but it’s almost done, and besides, (4) __________ friend told me Miss Fittich postponed it to next Friday.  
Dad: Well, okay. But be back by 12:30.  
Son: Thanks, Dad. Er… by the way, could I go buy (5) __________ new shirt for (6) ______ dance?
Additional comments:

The book suggests that cloze passages of academic prose can be valuable for advanced students. I think this kind of activity requires a certain level of language ability as well as a degree of logical thinking.

If learners do not have enough input to apply to the context or are not prepared to apply principles of logic to language acquisition, this kind of activity will not be effective.

Section 9 Activities for analyzing the use of articles

Name: Article analysis using cartoons

Source: Kayo Fujita

Purpose: Students look at article usage in context and analyze the rules

Level/Age/Size of class: Advanced (Linguistics class) /college students-adults/

2-30 students (It may be possible with a bigger group)

Materials: Cartoons (Examples shown in the Appendix 7 are taken from *The Far Side Calendar by Gary Larson*), a handout to explain the article usage which will be focused on

Time: 20 minutes or more

Steps:

1. Prepare cartoons with captions before class.

2. Go over article rules with students, eliciting answers as much as possible. If necessary, use the prepared handout to help students understand.

3. Divide students into small groups. Have them discuss the usage of articles. Give them a time limit and tell them they will report to the whole group.

4. Share with the whole group and discuss.

Possible follow-up/Alternatives: Students or the teacher could bring a poem, passage of prose etc. and the students discuss the usage of articles. (In the Appendix, there is a section where I introduce poems
I have seen a lot of cartoons with interesting usage of articles which higher level students might enjoy analyzing. It is a fun way to think about why a certain article is used in the context because the picture gives such a strong impact, also making it more memorable for students than by just reading a sentence with some article usage. Some cartoons are difficult to analyze and require deeper knowledge on article usage. If the students are advanced, they may find it interesting to discuss why a certain article is used in the context. ‘The Far Side’ has many challenging cartoons that provoke an abstruse kind of thinking.

**Section 10 Activities/ideas for correcting article errors**

**Name:** Finding errors in students’ conversations  
**Source:** Susan Sakayori (My former co-worker at the Nara YMCA)  
**Purpose:** The teacher has students reflect on what they said and self-correct after a speaking activity  
**Level/Age /Size of class:** High elementary and above/Junior high and above/2-10 students  
**Materials:** Blackboard and chalk  
**Time:** 15 minutes or more  
**What to do:**

1. Listen in on students’ conversations and in your notebook jot down some of the sentences where students have made a mistake with the usage of articles (or whatever grammar point you want to review).

2. Put the sentences on the board and ask the students to find the mistakes. If students are working in pairs or small groups, you can easily make a game out of the activity.

3. After they find the errors, try to see if they understand why *a* is used and why *the* is used.

This avoids getting into a long grammatical explanation which might be tedious for some students, and
gets students to think for themselves.

**Additional comments:**

It seems to me that students will be more interested in correcting mistakes this way rather than to correct some sentences they have no interest in. Many students would like to speak accurately, but some seem less concerned with grammatical errors unless they find some necessity or meaning in doing so. It is more engaging to work on language the students would like to use.

**Name:** Correction with gestures  
**Source:** From various teachers and classes I participated in  
**Purpose:** To raise awareness of consciousness in language usage and have students learn to self-correct.  
**Level/Age /Size of class:** All levels/Any age group/Any size, but more effective in smaller groups  
**Materials:** None  
**Time:** Variable  
**What to do:**

Some people use their fingers to indicate that something is missing from their students’ sentence. For example, if someone says, *I bought new car.* Then, the teacher can repeat the sentence using their thumb for ‘I’, index finger for ‘bought’, ring finger for ‘new’, little finger for ‘car’. By skipping the middle finger and pointing to it after you repeated the sentence, students know they left something out and think about what they missed.

**Additional comments:**

If we were working on fluency, obviously this method would not be effective. However, if we are working on accuracy in a smaller group of students, it is effective to have students self-correct. I think learning to self-correct is an important skill for students to learn. There will be a clear difference in progress between students who learn to think on their own and students who do not.
Section 11 Ideas for other activities for articles

Name: Newspaper headlines
Source: From various teachers and classes I have participated in, but reminded of and inspired by Calum Adamson’s presentation at a teachers’ meeting at the Nara YMCA
Purpose: Have students practice using articles and other aspects of the language in context.
Level/Age/Size of class: Intermediate and above/Adults/4-15
Materials: Newspaper headlines copied (enough for each pair or group), Blackboard
Time: 30 minutes or more
Steps:

1. Prepare newspaper headlines copied before class. Select headlines in which the articles have been dropped. Show one example enlarged for the whole class. Have them make a grammatically correct sentence from the headline. Brainstorm or elicit from students what they think the article is about. Write the words or phrases elicited from students on the board if necessary. For example, if we show a headline such as ‘Confessed Killer Choked Teacher In Rage’, first students would correct the headline to ‘A Confessed Killer Choked A Teacher To Death In A Rage.’ and discuss the usage as a group. After that, the teacher would ask students to suggest possible story details. Students might say something like, 'A killer who murdered a teacher confessed that he choked her to death.' 'He killed her because.....' ,'He decided to turn himself in because...','He was arrested by the police and ......'

2. Have the students practice making grammatical sentences from other headlines.

3. Ask students to make a story/write a story in pairs or small groups from one of the headlines Give them a time limit (10-15minutes).

4. Students report their story to the class orally.

Possible follow-up/Alternatives: Each group is given a different headline or the same headline.
Students can write their story as writing homework.

Name: Creative stories

Source: Gary Bloom (SMAT19 Sandanona at The School for International Training)

Purpose: Students will use articles correctly in context and be creative with the language

Level/Age/Size of class: High elementary and above/Any age group/4-20 students

Materials: Comic strips or cartoons or pictures/photos (enough copies for each group and enlarged if possible), Blackboard

Time: 30 minutes or more

Steps:

1. Enlarge a picture from a book, magazine, comic book etc. that will provide stimulus to create a story.

2. Attach the picture to the board. Elicit events of the story from students.

3. Write words, phrases next to the picture to reflect students’ suggestions.

4. Go over the story together using the words or phrases on the board. Try to teach them (remind them) to use useful words or sequence words, such as ‘One day’ ‘On a very hot Sunday afternoon’, ‘Then’, ‘After that’, ‘Finally’ etc. to tell the story.

5. Divide students in pairs or small groups, give them some pictures, and tell them to make a story together. Give them a time limit of about 15 minutes.

6. Students report their story to the class showing their pictures. Alternatively students could write the story together on a big sheet of paper and the students correct errors as a group with the teacher assisting. Another alternative is to ask students to write their story as homework.

Possible follow-up/Alternatives:

Students could also write their own speech bubbles in a story using cartoons or pictures. This could also
be set as homework with students sharing what they came up with in the next class.
7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I will discuss what teachers or learners need to be aware of in regard to article acquisition at different levels and what could help learners develop or improve their skills in using articles. Firstly, I will present what I personally think is important for learners at each level for effective acquisition of articles. Then I will conclude my dissertation with my personal views on learning in general, including my thoughts on article acquisition and language acquisition.

The following is a list of levels, some important points for learning articles and ways to develop or improve skill in using articles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Some important points for learning articles</th>
<th>Ways to improve/develop skill in using articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>-Students should recognize the form/meaning/use of articles in their context. -Students start learning the idea of</td>
<td>-Simple drills -Teacher’s corrections -Guided activities -Habit to speak in sentences -Writing about a topic around</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Activities</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>- Students should have more practice using what they learned accurately.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Students should start learning other rules in their context.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Students should be reminded to learn ‘chunks’.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Some useful drills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Teacher’s corrections</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Guided activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reading simple paragraphs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Writing simple paragraphs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Listening (dictation/cloze)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Listening to spoken English with context</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-intermediate</td>
<td>- Students should start to self-correct.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Students should be able to recognize the rules they learned and actively apply them to their context.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Students should be exposed to a variety of use of articles.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Guided self-study</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reading</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Writing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Listening (dictation/cloze)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Listening to an increased amount of English at natural speed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Teacher’s corrections</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Start self-correcting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Guided activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Grammar exercises</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Guided self-study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>- Students should be able to recognize a variety of usage in articles and try to apply the rules to their context.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Guided self-study</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Listening (dictation/cloze)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Start listening to what native speakers listen to.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Correcting their own errors</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Discussion on the usage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Grammar exercises</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Self-study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>- Students should be able to analyze and apply the rules.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Students should be able to self-correct easily.</td>
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<td>- Guided self-study</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Analyzing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Listening to the same things as native speakers</td>
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</table>

In the above list, ‘Guided activities’ mean that students can practice use of articles through whatever activity teachers plan for the class. Here, I also mean activities that focus on accuracy to some extent.

‘Guided self-study’ means that perhaps teachers could recommend some appropriate ways of self-study if students need or want to work on some usage of articles. Of course, intermediate or advanced
students will have questions or need help as well. However, I think these students should be able to address questions to their teachers or find some resource to solve their problems more easily. Unless they have a special purpose or need, probably they would not like to focus on learning the use of articles in class at this level.

As I have discussed in the previous chapters, since article errors do not usually cause a critical problem and there are more urgent aspects of language that need to be taken care of, it is not practically effective to spend enormous time on mastering the use of articles in ordinary EFL classrooms. However, it is not an easy area for Japanese learners to develop their skills in without some kind of guidance or unless they make a conscious effort to improve their use of articles.

There are countless stages in the language learning process and there are many different kinds of learners. No one learns or makes progress perfectly as a textbook guides them, a syllabus leads them or teachers expect. No one can tell us a method that is 100% guaranteed to improve language skills. Even if someone did, whether that approach worked with everyone or not would be highly questionable. Therefore, teachers need to be aware that each learner has the potential to get better at using the language while accepting the reality that not everyone will be able to attain a high level of accuracy in the same way or at the same level. Keeping this in mind, it is important for teachers to give learners some possible guidelines to improve their skills, but at the same time, it is important for us not to expect our students to reach the same goals in the same ways. After all, people have all kinds of different goals, expectations and reasons for learning a language. Since not all students are going to become linguists or reach the highest level of aptitude in English, it is practical for teachers to look at their students’ level;
for learners to look at their own present level and first work on realistic goals to move towards, instead of trying to master one aspect of the language at a time or setting unrealistic goals. Errors will probably not disappear completely from non-native speakers’ speech or writing. What we can do is reduce the amount or frequency of errors or make the errors less confusing or more understandable from our own learning experiences.

What, then, should we look at when we teach our students? What is the most important thing for us to remember? Probably it is the balance between content and language. Just focusing on content will not take our students far in language learning and just focusing on language accuracy will not motivate students in most cases. Thus, it does not seem effective to lose balance between the two.

In retrospect, remarkable change in my own or my students’ language learning did not take place overnight, but after a certain degree of effort and exposure to the language. ‘What learners learn’, ‘How they learn’, and ‘How much they actually learn to do on their own by learning’ is more likely to be the key to effective acquisition than ‘How long they learn’ ‘Who they learn from’ ‘Where they learn’ or ‘How much exposure they have’. It may be a cliché, but in my opinion, ‘where there is a will, there is a way.’ If it is truly important for us to be able to do something and we set our mind to it and work on it, then we will learn to do it better. Of course, there may be times when we encounter our limitations. However, the point is not to fight against the impossible, but to cultivate our potential through learning. I believe fortunate learners are the ones who are able to enjoy each step of their own learning as they experience it and believe in the possibilities that lie ahead in the future. It is a possibility that will be brought about by learning: whether to communicate with others, pursue a career, broaden horizons,
deepen knowledge, challenge ourselves, work with professional needs, or enrich our lives. I would certainly like to be a learner who believes in the potential and the joy of learning; who is open to challenges that foster my growth and open doors to further progress, and a teacher who encourages and assists my students in doing the same.
Bibliography


2. *A Poem from ‘Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul’*

   **I Am….**

   I am an architect: I’ve built a solid foundation; and each year I go to that school I add another floor of wisdom and knowledge.
I am a sculptor: I’ve shaped my morals and philosophies according to the clay of right and wrong.

I am a painter: With each new idea I express, I paint a new hue in the world’s multitude of colors.

I am a scientist: Each day that passes by, I gather new data, make important observations, and experiment with new concepts and ideas.

I am an astrologist: reading and analyzing the palms of life and each new person I encounter.

I am an astronaut: constantly exploring and broadening my horizons.

I am a doctor: I heal those who turn to me for consultation and advice, and I bring out the vitality in those who seem lifeless.

I am a lawyer: I’m not afraid to stand up for the inevitable and basic rights of myself and all others.

I am a police officer: I always watch out for other’s welfare and I am always on the scene preventing fights and keeping the peace.

I am a teacher: By my example others learn the importance of determination, dedication and hard work.

I am a mathematician: making sure I conquer each one of my problems with correct solutions.

I am a detective: peering through my two lenses, searching for meaning and significance in the mysteries of life.

I am a jury member: judging others and their situations only after I’ve heard and understood the entire story.

I am a banker: Others share their trust and values with me and never lose interest.

I am a hockey player: watching out for and dodging those who try to block my goal.

I am a marathon runner: full of energy, always moving and ready for the next challenge.

I am a mountain climber: Slowly but surely I am making my way to the top.

I am a tight-rope walker: Carefully and stealthily I pace myself through every rough time, but I always make it safely to the end.

I am a millionaire: rich in love, sincerity and compassion, and I own a wealth of knowledge, wisdom, experience and insight that is priceless.

Most important I am me.

Amy Yerkes

3. **Reading Lesson Plan**

**Theme:** Literature (Identity)

**Level of the students:** Pre-intermediate

**Age group:** Adults (6 students)

**Background of students:** All the students are housewives. They have been studying English at our
school for some years. They read a book (Children’s book) in English in the previous year.

**Length of the lesson:** 2 hours x 2 lessons

**Objectives of the lesson:**

**Content**
1. Students will enjoy an authentic poem from “Chicken Soup”
2. Students will learn a different way of expressing what they are/who they are.

**Language**
1. Students will have more/some experience with metaphor and develop a better understanding of it.
2. Students will try to use metaphor to explain their identity.
3. Students will introduce themselves in a new way rather than the same old manner of introducing themselves.
4. Students will make a book that has a collection of their own poems.
5. Students will try to use articles correctly.

**Day 1**

1. Write, “I am….” on the board.
2. Ask ss to think what could come after “I am.” Ss will brainstorm and make a list. (a graphic organizer) T will ask ss to think of as many things as possible, not necessarily about themselves. If ss look lost, T can give a few examples. Students work alone first.
3. Ss will share in pairs.
4. T will ask ss to share with the group.
5. T will ask ss if they can write some ideas by themselves. Work alone.
6. Ss will work in pairs. They will tell their partner what they wrote and can compare their lists.
7. T will give the handout to the students. As T reads it aloud for the class, ss will listen and follow her reading. (T will erase the name of the author for the upcoming activity.)
8. T will ask ss to freewrite. Ss will choose one of the questions written on a piece of paper and freewrite. (T will tell ss that they will be sharing with their classmates later.)
   a) What do you like about this poem?
   b) What don’t you like about this poem?
   c) What question do you have about this poem?
   d) What kind of person do you think this person is?
   e) Do you think this person is female or male? Why do you think so?
9. Ss will share what they wrote in pairs.
10. Ss will share what they have discussed with the entire group. T will ask ss to report what their partner told them.
11. T will put all the occupation (and other) words from the poem on the board. T may ask ss to pronounce the words on the board. If students have difficulty with any pronunciation, we will practice together.
12. Ss will work in pairs and discuss the meaning of each word. They can take turns asking, “What does an architect do?” “What does ‘millionaire’ mean?” If they don’t know, they can try to guess from the context. If they are still not sure, they should move on. T will tell them not to worry as we will check with other pairs later.

13. T will ask each pair to define each word. Everyone tells the class what they know. If they are incorrect, T will ask other pairs to help. If nobody knows, T can help.

14. Ss will read aloud in pairs. They will take turns and read each paragraph. After one person reads a paragraph, they will stop and ask questions to each other. They will discuss the meaning of the paragraph. Again, if they don’t understand or have a question, they can leave it for later.

15. T will ask one student to read a paragraph. Others listen. If anyone has a question about the paragraph, they can ask. Anyone who can explain will help the student(s) who are confused. Hopefully, we can figure out the meaning together.

16. We will read the poem together.

17. Ss will freewrite.
   a) How do you like the poem now?
   b) Did you change your opinion on the poem? Why? Why not?
   c) Now, can you answer the question(s) you had before? What is (are) your answers?

18. Ss will share in pairs.

19. Ss will report what their partner said to the whole group.

20. T will ask ss if they think the writer is female or male. Ss can guess and give reasons. After talking about it, T can introduce the name of the writer.

21. Ss will brainstorm what they can say about themselves. Ss will think of occupation (or other) words for themselves. T will ask ss to make a list (graphic organizer). They will work on their own.

22. Ss will work in pairs. They will show their graphic organizer to their partner and explain why they chose those words for themselves. T could suggest some useful expressions such as “I chose _____ because…” or “I could be a _____ because…” “I _______. What do you think is a good word for this?”

23. After pairwork, T will ask ss what words they came up with. Also, they can explain a little about their choice.

24. T will tell ss they can add more to their list after listening to their classmates.

25. T will ask ss to choose 5-10 things and write in a similar pattern to the text.

26. While they are writing, T will go around the room and, if anyone needs her help, she will be ready to assist them.

27. Homework;
   Ss will write their own poem. T will tell them to be ready to share in the next class. (Also, T will tell them to write it carefully so that their partner can read what they wrote.)
Day 2

1. Ss will take out their poem. T will ask them to read it quietly again and tell them that if they want to change something, they can.
2. Ss will work in pairs. They will read each other’s poem quietly.
3. Ss will respond to their partner. They can ask questions, give comments. They can also ask for suggestions if they want.
4. Ss will switch partners. They should talk to everyone in the class and do the same as in the previous step.
5. T will ask again if they want to change anything. If they want to, they can. If not, they can leave their poem as it is.
6. T will ask if they want to check anything with her/him. T will ask them to hand in their final poem. (The original one. They should not rewrite so that T can see their process.)

T will read ss’s poems and edit them if necessary. She/He will type them. They can make a collection of their own poems. T will try to give the book to the students in the following week. If they want, they can make the cover by themselves.

7. T will ask ss to think about their favorite poem, story or writer.
8. Ss will freewrite about what they want to talk about with their classmates. They will choose one of the following questions.
   a) What is your favorite poem, story or song lyric? Why do you like it?
   b) Who is your favorite writer or songwriter? Why do you like them?
   c) Is there any poem, story or song lyric you dislike? Why don’t you like it?
   d) Is there any writer or songwriter you dislike? Why do you dislike them?
   e) Do you have a recollection related to literature.
9. Ss will freewrite.
10. Ss will share in pairs.
11. Ss will report about their partner to the whole group.

If they have the book or CD they talked about at home, they can bring it to the class in the following class and exchange it with their classmates. In later classes, they can share what they thought about them!

4. Poems by students
The following are my students’ poems. After my first year of the graduate program at SIT, I came to think more about importance of the process of learning. In language learning, learning to produce
‘correct’ language is important. However, being able to use the language creatively and express ourselves freely is important as well. If we always focus on perfection and only look at the production when it is imperfect focusing on mistakes, it is natural that students will get frustrated or be unable to enjoy using the language. It is unrealistic to expect our production to be always perfect when we are learning a foreign language. The first three poems were written by students at pre-intermediate level. I did not correct any errors with their finished production. One of the students wrote her poem freely without following the example. I accepted it because I thought it unnecessary to follow the example if they did not need it. It seems that this student was inspired to write as she did and everyone was impressed with her poem.

I
I am a farmer because I bring up my sons with tender loving care as if a farmer plants seeds and grows plants with tender loving care.
I am an actress because I play roles of a wife, mother, student, tennis player and volunteer guide etc. as if an actress plays many roles.
I want to be a tour conductor because I want to guide tourists around ancient Nara by time machine, as if a tour conductor guide some place where tourist want to go.

2.
I am a chef: always consider to collect fresh and nutritious ingredients. I cook sweet smelling and good-looking delicious meals with using special spice named "LOVE".
I am a guitarist: I do finger exercises for the guitar every day. Sometimes strong, tender, happy, or sad, I can play any melody with my magical fingers, and make my audience feel happy.
I am a nurse: taking care of patients and cheering them up with much love and smile. I do my best to take away their pain of illness.

3. Living again
I stayed with you.
When I was a child, you always helped me.
I walked to you.
You were my light.
You were a sign of my way which I walk.
But I lost you now.
You had gone somewhere, like a shooting star.
However, your light had in my heart.
Even now I couldn't see you.
lend me your spirit.
lend me your voice.
lend me you all.
Where are you going?
Perhaps you will tell that you don't go anywhere.
But I can't see you.
I can't hear your voice.
I can't feel your spirit.
I want to feel your kindness again.
When I close your eyes, you always stay there.
I'll go on a trip of my life way again soon.
Because I found my life goal again.

The next three poems were written by students at high pre-intermediate to intermediate level. With some help from a native teacher, I edited these students’ writing to a certain extent.

1.
I'm a tailor. I make suits by cutting and sewing cloth for men. I'm proud of my work. You can see fantastic suits in my show window.
I'm a florist. I sell beautiful and sweet smelling flowers. Also, I make bouquets with pretty ribbons and paper for presents. Beautiful fantastic flowers are waiting for you to relax and refresh your mind. Flowers always give you happiness.
I'm a hairdresser. I cut hair and make beautiful hairstyles. Sometimes I perm or change hair color. Someday I'd like to win in a contest and become famous in the world.
I'm a librarian. I help people borrow books and put books to the place where they belong. I feel great joy to serve people to get knowledge through reading books.
I'm a diplomat. I'm employed by the foreign Ministry. I establish and maintain relations between nations. I meet many foreign ministers. I'll try to make the world peace. I hope that there will be no war.

2.
I am a school counselor: Students talk to me about various things, things they are worried about school, homework, family, friends, body etc. I listen kindly to them, help them with their problem. I sometimes give them advice.
I am a reader: I read books (novels) for the blind. I record it on a tape. They are able to enjoy the story.
I am a mechanic: I love cars. I am able to repair cars with problems. I can make custom cars, too.
I am a lifeguard: I work at the beach and the pool. I hope people swim safely. When a swimmer is drowning I save them. If they need artificial respiration, I provide it for them.
I am a private detective: If you want to investigate something, I am able to do anything. Of course I work unnoticed.
3. 
I am a diver.
I can sometimes become a fish in the water and can hear murmurs of the sea animals. I know the mysteries of the sea.
I am a novelist.
I've had a lot of children. Some are good, others are bad, but I love all of them. I hope that they can live for a long time even after my death and are loved by the people.
I am a president.
I always think about the welfare and happiness of the people. Although I hate war, I cannot help fighting the enemy if it is to protect my people.
I am a taxi driver.
I like people, so I make an effort to make friends with my passengers. But most of the passengers refuse my wish to become friends. I am sad about this.
I am a dog.
As I was loved and spoiled by my master's family, I became fierce. They are scared of me. Recently they always keep me chained up, and so I became tame.

5. [List of books for poems and quotations]
1. 42 Gifts I'd Like To Give To You  Edited by Douglas Richards  Blue Mountain Arts
2. Creeds Of Life, Love, & Inspiration  Blue Mountain Arts
3. Take Each Day One Step At A Time  Blue Mountain Arts
4. Don’t Ever Give UP Your Dreams  Blue Mountain Arts
5. Poems For Youth  Emily Dickinson  Little, Brown and Company
6. Words Of Wisdom  Ariel Books  Andrews and McMeel
7. Open Your Mind, Open Your Life  Taro Gold  Andrews and McMeel
9. Quotation site: [http://www.annabelle.net/topics/experience.html](http://www.annabelle.net/topics/experience.html)
   (This site has different topic areas, such as luck, hope, happiness etc.)

6. [Books that were used in class /recommended to students]
From 1 to 4, students should be above pre-intermediate level or students who are able to cope with reading well, despite their level. Children’s books by Roald Dahl were popular among my students and they enjoyed reading them on their own without my help. 5 is more challenging, so students’ level should be higher.

1. Children’s books by Roald Dahl (Fantastic Mr. Fox, Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator, etc.)
2. Charlotte’s Web by E.B White
3. *Chicken Soup for the Soul* (There are several books in the series.) by Health Communication Inc.
4. *The Orchard Book of Shakespeare Stories* by Andrew Matthews and Angela Barrett
   (My student found the book. It is easy to read and she enjoys reading Shakespeare.)
5. Short stories (*Tales of the Unexpected* by Roald Dahl, *Crime never pays* from Oxford etc.)

The following books are some that Noriko Nishiguchi read with her students and found were quite successful. Noriko was the chief instructor at the Nara YMCA and is presently working at Congress Institute. She especially enjoys teaching through reading.

**For Elementary level and above**

*Animal Farm* / George Orwell / Signet Classic

*Superfudge* / Judy Blume / Dell Publishing

*Totto-chan The Little Girl by the Window* / Tetsuko Kuroyanagi / Kodansha

*Chicken Soup for the Soul* / Health Communications Inc.

**For low-pre-intermediate and above**

*Tuesdays With Morrie* / Mitch Albom / Doubleday

**For high-pre-intermediate and above**

*Joyluck Club* / Amy Tan

*Follow Your Heart* / Sussanna Tamaro / Dell Publishing

*Black Like Me* / John Howard Griffin / Signet Non-Fiction

According to Noriko, the levels of the books are higher than actual students’ levels, however, she chooses the books if she feels the students’ background knowledge of the subject area can help them with difficult vocabulary and any grammatical challenges the books may provide.

7. **Examples of cartoons for Section 9 Activities for analyzing the use of articles**
   Taken from *The Far Side 1994 Off-The-Wall Calendar.*

   Possible Task: Explain the usage of articles in each cartoon.
Appendix 1: Chart for Determining Articles (Adapted from Brender, 1989)

1. Noun

2. Common

3. Singular

11. When another determiner is used
   This book is interesting.

12. When some possessives are used
   Their house is near here.

13. Before uncountables
   There was water all over.

14. When clause marker is used
   Which room are we in?

15. Before an object in some prepositional phrases
   I came here by bus.

16. Before succeeding nouns in a series after the article the
   He bought a shirt, a hat and a belt. The shirt and hat were on sale.

17. Before gerundials
   Smoking is not allowed here.

18. Before some fixed expressions
   Christmas is near at hand.

19. Before some ailments
   He had cancer.

20. Subsequent mention
    I saw a cute dog on the way here.
    The dog was sitting by the post office and…

21. Specificity
    (See examples in Step 5)
    *Shared knowledge
    *Ranking adjectives
    *Postmodification
    *One of a kind

22. Representative nouns
    The novel developed rapidly in the 19th century.

23. The best/The correct
    That is the answer.

24. Some ailments
    I had the flu.

25. By/to a part of the body
    He grabbed the man by the arm.
    He was soaked to the skin.

26. In + times of the day/by + time or quantity
    I have a class in the morning.
    She is paid by the hour.

27. Before certain numbers
    A hundred people attended the conference.

28. Before few/ before great many
    A few students did not show up.