

EAG01 — Articles & Nouns

Chapter EAG01 · CDS Grammar Level

CDS Level

✦ **What This Chapter Covers:** Articles (*a, an, the*) and Nouns are among the most consistently tested topics in CDS English. Together they appear across **Spotting Errors**, **Fill in the Blanks**, and **Sentence Improvement** question types. This chapter merges both topics because article usage is inseparable from noun type — whether a noun is countable or uncountable, proper or common, directly determines which article (if any) it takes.

PART A — ARTICLES

1. The Three Articles — At a Glance

English has three articles. Two are **indefinite** (*a, an*) and one is **definite** (*the*). The choice between them depends on sound, context, and noun type.

A

Indefinite Article “a”

Before consonant sounds

Used before a word beginning with a **consonant sound**. Not the letter — the *sound*. Refers to any one non-specific member of a class.

a book

a university

a one-eyed man

a European

a useful tool

AN

Indefinite Article “an”

Before vowel sounds

Used before a word beginning with a **vowel sound**. Determined entirely by *pronunciation*, not spelling.

an apple

an hour

an honest man

an MBA

an NDA cadet

THE

Definite Article “the”

Specific / already known

Used when both speaker and listener know **which specific** thing is meant. Also used with superlatives, unique objects, rivers, ranges, etc.

the sun

the Himalayas

the Ganga

the Indian Army

2. “A” vs “An” – The Sound Rule

Core Rule: The choice between “a” and “an” depends entirely on the **initial sound of the following word**, not its spelling. Vowel sound → “an”. Consonant sound → “a”.

Use “an” – vowel sound

- ▶ **an hour** – ‘h’ is silent → vowel sound
- ▶ **an honest man** – ‘h’ silent → vowel sound
- ▶ **an heir** – silent h → /eə/ vowel
- ▶ **an MBA** – spoken ‘em-bee-ay’ → vowel start
- ▶ **an X-ray** – spoken ‘ex-ray’ → vowel start
- ▶ **an IAS officer** – ‘I’ spoken as vowel
- ▶ **an NDA cadet** – ‘N’ spoken as /en/ vowel

Use “a” – consonant sound

- ▶ **a university** – starts with /j/ (y-sound)
- ▶ **a European** – starts with /j/ (y-sound)
- ▶ **a one-eyed man** – ‘one’ starts with /w/
- ▶ **a useful tool** – ‘useful’ starts with /j/
- ▶ **a union** – starts with /j/ consonant
- ▶ **a utensil** – starts with /j/ consonant
- ▶ **a historian** – ‘h’ is pronounced → consonant

△ Exam Trap – Most Common Error: Students write “an university” or “an useful” because they see a vowel letter. But “university” and “useful” begin with a /j/ sound (like “you”) – a *consonant* sound. Use **“a”**. Conversely, “hour”, “honest”, “heir” begin with a silent ‘h’ → vowel sound → use **“an”**.

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Topic: a vs an – Sound Rule

Q1. Choose the correct article: “She is ___ honest officer who served for ___ decade.”

- (a) a ... a
- (b) an ... a
- (c) an ... an
- (d) a ... an

Answer: (b) an ... a

"Honest" starts with a silent h → vowel sound → **an**. "Decade" starts with /d/ consonant sound → **a**. This is a classic CDS Spotting Errors pattern where students write "a honest" by looking at the letter, not the sound.

Q2. "He was ___ one-man army who had ___ MBA from a reputed university." Select the correct pair of articles.

- (a) a ... an
- (b) an ... a
- (c) a ... a
- (d) an ... an

Answer: (a) a ... an

"One" begins with /w/ consonant sound → **a one-man army**. "MBA" is read as letters 'em-bee-ay' → starts with /em/ vowel → **an MBA**. Both traps appear in the same sentence – typical CDS style.

3. Uses of "the" – When to Use the Definite Article

3.1 Standard Uses of "the" CORE RULES

Rule	Example	Exam Tip
Second mention of a noun	<i>I saw a dog. The dog was brown.</i>	First time → a/an; second → the
Unique / one-of-a-kind	<i>the sun, the moon, the earth</i>	Only one exists
Superlative degree	<i>the best soldier, the tallest peak</i>	Always "the"
Ordinal numbers	<i>the first, the second, the last</i>	Non-negotiable rule

Rule	Example	Exam Tip
Rivers	<i>the Ganga, the Nile, the Amazon</i>	All rivers take "the"
Mountain ranges	<i>the Himalayas, the Alps, the Rockies</i>	Range = the; single peak = no article
Seas & Oceans	<i>the Pacific, the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal</i>	All large water bodies
Groups of islands / union countries	<i>the Andamans, the Philippines, the USA, the UK</i>	Plural or union names
Newspapers	<i>the Hindu, the Times of India</i>	All major newspapers
Sacred books	<i>the Bible, the Quran, the Gita, the Vedas</i>	Religious texts
Musical instruments (when played)	<i>She plays the guitar / the sitar</i>	Play + the + instrument
The + adjective = a class of people	<i>the poor, the rich, the brave, the dead</i>	Refers to entire group
Parallel comparative	<i>The more you read, the wiser you become</i>	Both parts need "the"
Historical events / periods	<i>the French Revolution, the Middle Ages</i>	Named historical events
Deserts	<i>the Sahara, the Thar, the Gobi</i>	All major deserts

3.2 When NOT to use "the"

COMMON TRAP

Situation	Correct Form	Wrong Form
Single mountain peaks	<i>Mount Everest, Mount Fuji, K2</i>	the Mount Everest
Names of countries (singular)	<i>India, France, Japan</i>	the India
Names of continents	<i>Asia, Europe, Africa</i>	the Asia
Names of cities	<i>Delhi, Paris, London</i>	the Delhi
Languages	<i>She speaks Hindi. He knows French.</i>	the Hindi

Situation	Correct Form	Wrong Form
Subjects of study	<i>He studies mathematics / history</i>	the mathematics
Meals	<i>Breakfast is ready. Have dinner.</i>	the breakfast
Titles with proper names	<i>President Murmu, Captain Sharma</i>	the President Murmu
Sports and games	<i>He plays cricket / chess / football</i>	the cricket
Most lakes	<i>Lake Superior, Lake Victoria, Dal Lake</i>	the Lake Victoria

TRICKY Q

Proper Nouns & Article Confusion

Q. Identify the error: "The Everest is the highest peak in the Himalayas and the Asia."

Errors: "The Everest" → Wrong. Single peaks never take "the". Write *Mount Everest*.

"the Asia" → Wrong. Continents never take "the". Write *Asia*.

Correct sentence: "*Mount Everest is the highest peak in the Himalayas and Asia.*"

Note: "the Himalayas" is correct – mountain *range* always takes "the".

Q. "The President Modi addressed the nation via the radio." – Spot the error(s).

Error: "The President Modi" → When a title is directly followed by a proper name, no article is used. Write *President Modi*. But "the radio" is correct (specific medium/device).

Rule to remember: Title + Name = No article. Title without name = "the" (e.g., *The President addressed the nation*).

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Topic: Use of "the" with Proper Nouns

Q3. (CDS 2024-I style) Choose the correct sentence:

- (a) The Ganga is the holiest river of the India.
- (b) Ganga is holiest river of India.
- (c) The Ganga is the holiest river of India.
- (d) The Ganga is holiest river of India.

Answer: (c)

Rivers take "the" → *The Ganga* ✓. Superlatives take "the" → *the holiest* ✓. Country names (singular) take no article → *India* not "the India" ✓. Option (b) misses "the" with river and superlative. Option (d) misses "the" before superlative.

Q4. (CDS 2023-II style) Fill in the blank: " ___ more you practise, ___ better you perform."

- (a) The ... the
- (b) A ... a
- (c) The ... a
- (d) No article needed

Answer: (a) The ... the

This is the parallel comparative structure: *The more ... the better*. Both halves of the structure must have "the". If either "the" is dropped, it is a grammatical error. Commonly tested in Spotting Errors — the second "the" is usually the one omitted in wrong options.

4. Uses of "a / an" — Indefinite Articles

Core Uses of "a / an"

- ▶ **First mention** of a countable singular noun: *I saw **a** soldier.*

- ▶ **Equivalent to "one"**: *Give me **a** pen*

- ▶ **Any member of a class**: *A dog is **a** faithful animal.*

- ▶ **Profession / identity**: *He is **a** doctor. She is **an** engineer.*

- ▶ **Exclamations**: *What **a** beautiful day! What **an** idea!*

Special & Tricky Uses

- ▶ **After "what" and "such"**: *What **a** pity! Such **an** honour!*

- ▶ **After "half"**: *half **a** kilo, half **an** hour*

- ▶ **Name used as common noun**: *He is **a** Ratan Tata of business.*

- ▶ **a few vs few / a little vs little**: ***a few** = some; **few** = almost none*

- ▶ **Before certain numbers**: ***a** hundred, **a** thousand, **a** million*

► **Rate / ratio:** *twice a day, ₹50 a kg, 60 km an hour*

► **Fixed expressions:** *make a noise, take a seat, have a rest*

5. Zero Article — When No Article is Used

Sometimes **no article at all** is used. This is called the “zero article”. Knowing when to use no article is just as important as knowing which one to use.

PL Plural & Uncountable Nouns (general)

General statements about a class of things.

Soldiers are brave.

Water is essential.

Gold is precious.

PR Proper Nouns (most)

Names of people, singular countries, cities, languages, subjects.

India, Delhi, Hindi

Mount Everest

Asia, Mathematics

IN Institutions by Purpose

When visiting a place for its intended purpose, no article. When visiting as a physical building, “the” is used.

go to school/hospital

go to the school (building)

AB Abstract Nouns (general)

Abstract nouns used generally take no article. When specific, add “the”.

Honesty is the best policy.

The courage he showed was remarkable.

💡 Institutions Memory Trick — Purpose vs Place:

Purpose (no article): go to *school* (as student) | in *hospital* (as patient) | in *prison* (as prisoner) | at *sea* (on voyage)

Physical location (use “the”): go to *the school* (as visitor) | visit *the hospital* | inspect *the prison*

6. Tricky Contexts — The Most Tested Patterns

6.1 Mountain Peaks vs Mountain Ranges

VERY COMMON

RULE

Single peak → no article | Mountain range → the

✓ We trekked to Mount Everest. ✓ The soldiers crossed the Himalayas.

~~✗ We trekked to the Mount Everest. ✗ Soldiers crossed Himalayas.~~

6.2 "a few / few" and "a little / little"

FILL IN THE BLANK

With "a" → Positive meaning (some)

- ▶ a few = some, enough → countable: *I have a few friends.*
- ▶ a little = some, enough → uncountable: *There is a little water.*

Without "a" → Negative meaning (barely any)

- ▶ few = almost none → countable: *Few soldiers survived.*
- ▶ little = almost none → uncountable: *There is little hope.*

6.3 Parallel Comparative – "The more ... the better"

SPOTTING ERRORS

RULE – BOTH HALVES MUST HAVE "THE"

✓ The harder you train, the better you perform.

~~✗ The harder you train, better you perform. (missing "the" in second part)~~

6.4 Special Article Table – Proper Nouns

MUST MEMORISE

Category	Uses "the"	No Article
Countries	<i>the USA, the UK, the UAE, the Netherlands</i>	<i>India, France, Japan, China</i>
Mountains	<i>the Himalayas, the Alps, the Andes (ranges)</i>	<i>Mount Everest, K2, Kanchenjunga (peaks)</i>
Water bodies	<i>the Ganga, the Pacific, the Bay of Bengal</i>	<i>Lake Victoria, Lake Superior (lakes)</i>
Newspapers	<i>the Hindu, the Guardian, the Tribune</i>	<i>India Today (magazine)</i>
Organisations	<i>the United Nations, the WHO, the Indian Army</i>	<i>NASA, ISRO, Parliament</i>

7. Grammar Rules Tested in CDS – Articles

△ Rule 1 – Title + Proper Name: No Article

✓ President Murmu, Captain Sharma, Prime Minister Modi | ✗ ~~the President Murmu~~
But: “The President of India gave a speech” (title without name → “the” is correct)

△ Rule 2 – Same Noun, Different Article, Different Meaning

He went to **prison** (as prisoner) vs He went to **the prison** (as visitor)

She is in **bed** (sleeping) vs She is in **the bed** (specific bed)

At **sea** (on voyage) vs In **the sea** (in the water itself)

💡 **Memory Hook – RSUM:** Use “the” when the noun is **R**eferred to again, is **S**uperlative, is **U**nique, or is a named body of water. For everything else, default to context.

✓ Rule 3 – Ordinals and Superlatives always need “the”

✓ She was **the first** woman to climb that peak. | ✗ ~~She was first woman to climb.~~

✓ He was **the best** cadet in his batch. | ✗ ~~He was best cadet in his batch.~~

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Spotting Errors – Articles (CDS 2024–2025 pattern)

Q5. Find the error: “(A) She plays / (B) the cricket / (C) every evening / (D) No error”

Answer: (B) Sports and games do not take any article. Write: *She plays **cricket** every evening.* “The cricket” would mean a specific cricket match, which changes the meaning and is not standard.

Q6. Find the error: “(A) He is / (B) a unique person / (C) who plays the piano / (D) No error”

Answer: (A)/(B) “Unique” begins with /j/ (y-sound) → it is a consonant sound → use “a”. “a unique person” is already correct in the stem. “plays the piano” is correct

(musical instruments when played take "the"). Answer is **(D) No error** if the stem itself is correct. This type tests reading under exam pressure.

Q7. (CDS 2025-I pattern) Fill in the blank: " ___ Himalayas lie to the north of India, and ___ Mount Everest is their highest point."

- (a) The ... The
- (b) The ... no article
- (c) No article ... The
- (d) No article ... no article

Answer: (b) Mountain *ranges* take "the" → *The Himalayas*. Single mountain *peaks* take no article → *Mount Everest* (not "The Mount Everest"). This contrast is among the most repeated patterns in CDS English over the past three years.

PART B – NOUNS

8. What is a Noun? – Five Types

A noun names a person, place, thing, quality, or idea. Noun type determines article usage, verb agreement, and pluralisation – making it foundational for all grammar questions.

PR

Proper Noun

Names a specific individual

Always capitalised. Refers to a unique entity – not a class. Most proper nouns take no article.

Arjun

Delhi

India

UPSC, NDA

CM

Common Noun

Names any member of a class

General members of a group. Written in lowercase. Takes articles depending on context.

soldier

city

river

dog, book, officer

CO

Collective Noun

Names a group as one unit

A collection of people, animals, or things treated as a single unit. Verb agreement is exam-tested.

AB

Abstract Noun

Names a quality, idea, or state

Cannot be seen or touched. Formed from adjectives/verbs using suffixes. Usually uncountable.

army

fleet

committee

jury, crew, crowd

courage

honesty

freedom

wisdom, loyalty

MA

Material Noun

Names a material or substance

Raw materials. Uncountable in standard usage — cannot be pluralised.

gold

water

steel

iron, cotton, wood

9. Countable vs Uncountable Nouns ▲ Most Tested

Key Distinction: Countable nouns can be counted and have both singular and plural forms (one soldier, two soldiers). Uncountable nouns cannot be directly counted (water, advice, furniture) and **always take a singular verb**. The biggest category of CDS errors comes from treating uncountable nouns as countable.

Uncountable Nouns — Always Singular

- ▶ **advice** — *He gave me good advice.* (not “advices”)
- ▶ **information** — *The information is correct.*
- ▶ **furniture** — *The furniture was expensive.*
- ▶ **luggage / baggage** — *His luggage was heavy.*
- ▶ **news** — *The news is good.* (always singular)
- ▶ **scenery, machinery, progress** — singular verbs
- ▶ **knowledge, poetry, research** — singular verbs

Nouns That Look Plural but Take Singular Verbs

- ▶ **mathematics / physics / economics** — singular
- ▶ **politics / athletics / news** — singular
- ▶ **innings / series / means** — singular
- ▶ **species / aircraft / offspring** — singular or context



Uncountable Cluster to Memorise: Advice, Information, Knowledge, Furniture, Luggage, Baggage, Machinery, Scenery, Poetry, Progress, News, Work, Traffic, Research,

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Topic: Countable / Uncountable — Spotting Errors

Q8. Find the error: "(A) She gave me / (B) an advice / (C) that helped me a lot / (D) No error"

Answer: (B) "Advice" is an uncountable noun and cannot take "an" or be pluralised. Correct: *She gave me **advice** that helped me a lot.* You can say "a piece of advice" but never "an advice". This error has appeared across multiple CDS exams.

Q9. (CDS 2024-II pattern) Find the error: "(A) The news / (B) about the operation / (C) are very encouraging / (D) No error"

Answer: (C) "News" is always singular → use "**is**", not "are". Correct: *The news about the operation **is** very encouraging.* "News" ends in 's' and looks plural, but it is a singular uncountable noun.

10. Plural Forms — Rules & Irregulars

10.1 Standard Pluralisation Rules

FILL IN THE BLANK

Rule	Singular → Plural	Examples
Most nouns: add -s	book → books	<i>soldier, soldiers; river, rivers</i>
Ends in -s, -sh, -ch, -x, -z : add -es	church → churches	<i>box→boxes; bench→benches; class→classes</i>
Consonant + y : change y → ies	army → armies	<i>duty→duties; country→countries; lady→ladies</i>
Vowel + y : add -s only	day → days	<i>key→keys; boy→boys; monkey→monkeys</i>
Ends in -f / -fe : change to -ves	leaf → leaves	<i>knife→knives; life→lives; wife→wives; wolf→wolves</i>

Rule	Singular → Plural	Examples
Exception (add -s only)	roof → roofs	<i>chief</i> → <i>chiefs</i> ; <i>belief</i> → <i>beliefs</i> ; <i>cliff</i> → <i>cliffs</i>
Ends in -o: mostly add -es	hero → heroes	<i>potato</i> → <i>potatoes</i> ; <i>tomato</i> → <i>tomatoes</i> ; <i>mango</i> → <i>mangoes</i>
Foreign/music terms: add -s	piano → pianos	<i>photo</i> → <i>photos</i> ; <i>radio</i> → <i>radios</i> ; <i>zoo</i> → <i>zoos</i> ; <i>memo</i> → <i>memos</i>

10.2 Irregular Plurals VERY COMMON IN CDS

Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
man	men	woman	women
child	children	ox	oxen
mouse	mice	goose	geese
tooth	teeth	foot	feet
criterion	criteria	phenomenon	phenomena
datum	data	medium	media
syllabus	syllabi	stimulus	stimuli
analysis	analyses	crisis	crises
sheep	sheep (same)	deer	deer (same)
fish	fish (same)	series	series (same)

TRICKY Q Plural Traps & Collective Noun Errors

Q. Identify the error: "The criterias for selection to the NDA are strict."

Error: "criterias" → Wrong. "Criteria" is *already plural* (singular: criterion). You cannot add 's' to an already-plural Latin-derived word.

Correct: The **criteria** for selection to the NDA are strict.

Same rule applies: phenomenon → phenomena (not “phenomenas”); datum → data (not “datas”).

Q. Identify the error: “He invited all his mother-in-laws to the ceremony.”

Error: “mother-in-laws” → Wrong. In compound nouns, the *head noun* (the main noun) is pluralised, not the last word.

Correct: mothers-in-law

Same rule: commanders-in-chief, passers-by, courts martial. The modifier (“in-law”) never takes the plural ‘s’.

11. Collective Nouns – Verb Agreement

Rule: A collective noun takes a **singular verb** when the group acts as one unit, and a **plural verb** when members act individually. In CDS, the singular verb is almost always the expected answer unless the sentence explicitly describes individual actions.

Collective Nouns – Military & Defence

- ▶ **army** – The army *was* deployed.
- ▶ **fleet** – A fleet of ships *was* dispatched.
- ▶ **regiment** – The regiment *marched* forward.
- ▶ **squadron** – The squadron *took* off at dawn.
- ▶ **platoon / brigade / battalion** – singular verbs
- ▶ **crew** – The crew *was* well-trained.

Collective Nouns – Animals & People

- ▶ **committee** – The committee *has* decided.
- ▶ **jury** – The jury *was* unanimous.
- ▶ **flock** of birds/sheep; **herd** of cattle
- ▶ **pride** of lions; **pack** of wolves
- ▶ **school** of fish; **gaggle** of geese
- ▶ **swarm** of bees; **murder** of crows

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Topic: Collective Nouns & Subject-Verb Agreement

Q10. Find the error: “(A) The committee / (B) have decided / (C) to approve the proposal / (D) No error”

Answer: (B) "The committee" acts as a single unit here → use singular verb "**has decided**", not "have decided". The committee **has** decided to approve the proposal.
 Note: If the sentence said "The committee are divided in their opinions", the plural "are" would be acceptable (individual members acting separately).

12. Gender of Nouns Sentence Improvement

Masculine	Feminine	Masculine	Feminine
king	queen	duke	duchess
actor	actress	hero	heroine
host	hostess	poet	poetess
waiter	waitress	tiger	tigress
emperor	empress	master	mistress
widower	widow	nephew	niece
groom	bride	fox	vixen
lion	lioness	drake	duck

13. Possessive Case — Apostrophe Rules Spotting Errors

Apostrophe Rules

- ▶ **Singular noun:** add 's — *the soldier's rifle*

- ▶ **Plural ending in -s:** apostrophe only — *the soldiers' rifles*

- ▶ **Irregular plural (not -s):** add 's — *the children's school*

- ▶ **Compound noun:** add 's to last word — *my father-in-law's house*

- ▶ **Joint possession:** 's to last name only — *Ram and Shyam's house*

Inanimate Objects — Use "of" instead

- ▶ ✓ *the leg of the table* (not "the table's leg")

- ▶ ✓ *the cover of the book*

- ▶ **Exceptions (apostrophe accepted):**

- ▶ **Time expressions:** *a day's work, an hour's delay, today's news*

- ▶ **Personification:** *nature's beauty, fortune's favour*

- ▶ **Separate possession:** 's to each — *Ram's and Shyam's houses*

14. Key Noun Rules Tested in CDS

⚠ Rule 1 — “News” is ALWAYS singular:

- ✓ The news **is** good. | ✗ ~~The news are good.~~
- ✓ No news **is** good news. | ✗ ~~No news are good news.~~

⚠ Rule 2 — Uncountable nouns never take a/an or plural -s:

- ✓ She gave me good **advice**. | ✗ ~~She gave me an advice / advices.~~
- ✓ He has **furniture** in his room. | ✗ ~~He has furnitures.~~
- ✓ Please share the **information**. | ✗ ~~Please share an information / informations.~~

⚠ Rule 3 — “Criteria”, “phenomena”, “data” are PLURAL:

- ✓ The criteria **are** clear. | ✗ ~~The criteria is clear.~~ (criteria = plural of criterion)
- ✓ These phenomena **were** observed. | ✗ ~~These phenomena was observed.~~

✅ Rule 4 — Compound Noun Plurals:

The head/main noun in a compound gets pluralised, never the modifier:

- ✓ mother-in-law → **mothers-in-law** | ✗ ~~mother-in-laws~~
- ✓ commander-in-chief → **commanders-in-chief** | ✓ passer-by → **passers-by**

15. Abstract Noun Formation & Confused Noun Pairs

Abstract Noun Suffixes

- ▶ Adj + **-ness**: brave→bravery;
kind→kindness

- ▶ Adj + **-ity**: able→ability;
sincere→sincerity

- ▶ Verb + **-tion/-sion**: act→action;
decide→decision

Commonly Confused Noun Pairs

- ▶ **advice** (noun) vs **advise** (verb)

- ▶ **practice** (noun) vs **practise** (verb)

- ▶ **effect** (noun) vs **affect** (verb)

- ▶ **principal** (main/chief) vs **principle** (rule/value)

▶ Verb + **-ment**: achieve→achievement;
govern→government

▶ Noun + **-hood**: child→childhood;
brother→brotherhood

▶ Noun + **-ship**: friend→friendship;
leader→leadership

▶ **stationary** (not moving) vs **stationery**
(writing materials)

▶ **complement** (completes) vs **compliment**
(praise)

▶ **counsel** (advice/adviser) vs **council**
(governing body)

CDS PYQ

Topic: Noun Errors — Spotting & Sentence Improvement

Q11. (CDS 2024-I pattern) Find the error: "(A) The officer / (B) gave a very good / (C) advise to the cadets / (D) No error"

Answer: (C) "Advise" is a verb; the noun is "**advice**". Correct: *gave very good advice to the cadets*. Also note: "a ... advice" would be wrong since "advice" is uncountable (no "a"). Say "gave good advice" not "gave a good advice".

Q12. Sentence Improvement: "The committee have decided to postpone the recruitment."

- (a) has been decided
- (b) has decided
- (c) decided
- (d) No improvement needed

Answer: (b) has decided

The committee acting as a single unit takes a **singular verb**. Replace "have decided" with "**has decided**". This is one of the most frequently repeated Sentence Improvement patterns in CDS English over 2023–2025.

TRICKY Q

Combined Articles + Nouns Errors

Q. Identify ALL errors: "The furnitures in the hall was moved to a new room by the staffs."

Two errors:

1. "furnitures" → "furniture" is uncountable; no plural form. Write *furniture*.
2. "staffs" → "staff" is a collective noun used without plural -s in standard usage.

Write *staff*.

Verb: "was moved" is correct (furniture = uncountable = singular verb).

Corrected sentence: *The furniture in the hall was moved to a new room by the staff.*

Q. "An unique soldier with a NDA pedigree joined the corps." – Spot both article errors.

Error 1: "An unique" → "unique" starts with /j/ (y-sound) → consonant sound → use "a unique".

Error 2: "a NDA" → "NDA" is read as 'en-dee-ay' → starts with /en/ vowel sound → use "an NDA".

Corrected: *A unique soldier with an NDA pedigree joined the corps.*



Quick Reference – Articles & Nouns

a vs an Rule

- Based on **sound**, not spelling
- an hour, an honest, an heir (silent h)
- a university, a useful, a union (y-sound)
- an MBA, an IAS, an NDA (vowel letter names)
- a one-eyed (w-sound), a European (y-sound)

Always "the"

- Rivers, mountain ranges, deserts, seas
- Superlatives & ordinals (the best, the first)
- Newspapers, sacred books
- Musical instruments (play the guitar)
- Plural / union country names (the USA, the UK)

Never Any Article

- Single peaks (Mount Everest)
- Cities, singular countries, continents
- Languages, subjects, sports, meals
- Title + proper name (President Modi)
- Abstract nouns in general sense

Always Singular Verbs

Can't Pluralise

- advice, information, knowledge

Irregular Plurals

- man→men;
woman→women;

- news, mathematics, physics, economics
- politics, athletics, innings, series
- furniture, advice, luggage, information
- means, species, aircraft, offspring

- furniture, luggage, baggage, machinery
- scenery, poetry, progress, news
- research, equipment, traffic, work

- child→children
- criterion→criteria; phenomenon→phenomena
- datum→data; medium→media
- sheep, deer, fish → same form

Purpose vs Location

- go to **school** (as student)
- go to **the school** (as visitor)
- in **hospital** (as patient)
- at **sea** (on voyage)
- in **prison** (as prisoner)

Compound Plural Rule

- mothers-in-law (NOT mother-in-laws)
- commanders-in-chief
- passers-by
- courts martial
- Pluralise the HEAD noun

Top Exam Traps

- “an university” is WRONG (“a university”)
- “the Mount Everest” is WRONG
- “advices” is WRONG (advice = uncountable)
- “the criteria is” is WRONG (“criteria are”)
- “the more ... better” is WRONG (the more ... the better)

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