

We stood face to face/side by side/back to back.

Cf also *inch by inch*, *eye to eye*, *turn and turn about*, *man to man*, *from beginning to end*, *from father to son*.

NOTE Not all binomials with zero are adverbials, but when they are not, articles are usually optional:

I am glad to say that (the) mother and (the) child are both doing well.
The crash resulted in the death of (both) (a) father and (a) son.

Article usage with abstract nouns

5.21 Abstract nouns tend to be *count* when they refer to unitary phenomena such as events and *noncount* when they refer to activities, states, and qualities.

Typically count: *meeting*, *arrival*, *discovery*

Genuine *discoveries* are rarer than gradual *improvements*.

Typically noncount: *employment*, *happiness*, *sleep*, *swimming*

Sleep is necessary for good *health*.

But as we saw in 5.1, some nouns can be both noncount and count; compare:

Every child needs to be treated with *kindness*.

He did me { *a (great) kindness* that day.
many kindnesses over the years.

They hoped that { *revolution* } would improve their conditions.
a revolution

She is studying *European history*.

The country has *a troubled history*.

It will be seen from these examples that the effect of the indefinite article is partitive and that this can be qualitative (*a troubled history*) or quantitative (*a great kindness*). Cf 5.2. The partitive effect is often accompanied by modification of the noun:

This ten-year-old plays the oboe with { *sensitivity*.
a striking sensitivity.
**a sensitivity*.

NOTE Names of languages usually have zero article:

She speaks *Japanese* quite fluently.
How do you say this in *Italian*?

But in some expressions, *the* can be used:

Beckett's works in *English* have often been translated from *(the) French*.

And the indefinite article can be used for qualitative partition:

She speaks *a tolerable French*.

The articles in generic reference

5.22 Consider the following sentences:

Speech My neighbour apparently has *dogs*; I hear them barking at night.
generic Dogs make admirable companions for children and adults alike.

In the former the reference is *specific* to particular dogs. In the latter the reference is *generic*: the sentence speaks not of particular dogs but of the whole class of dogs. All three types of article can be used to make a generic reference: *the* usually, and *a/an* always, with singular count nouns; zero with plural count nouns and with noncount nouns. For example:

The car } became an increasing necessity of life in the twentieth
A car }
Cars }

Velvet is an excellent material for curtains.

In fact, however, the three article modes are on a very different footing, with zero by far the most natural way of expressing the generic, irrespective of the function or position of the noun phrase in sentence structure:

Research is vital for *human progress*.

Many professors prefer *research* to *teaching*.

Crime is often attributable to *drugs*.

Horses are still *wild animals* in some parts of the world.

Exceptionally, some count nouns function as noncount generics in this way:

Mary is studying *dance* as well as *film*.

When *man* meets *woman*, a certain tension seems natural.

But more usually when *man* occurs with zero it is generic for *humanity* (a usage resisted on grounds of sexism):

Nuclear warfare would jeopardize the survival of *man*.

5.23 By contrast, the indefinite article has a distinctly limited role in conveying generic meaning, since it tends in non-referring use to carry a general partitive implication (such that *a* means 'any') which may in certain contexts be merely *tantamount* to a generic. The limitations on generic implication can be seen in comparing the following examples:

Tigers run } more gracefully than most animals.
A tiger runs }

Tigers are } becoming extinct.
**A tiger* is }

NOTE

The foregoing reflects the strong association of the indefinite article (and zero) with a descriptive and hence non-referring role in such functions as grammatical complement: