

I am just about to move into *an* apartment quite near where you live.
 Contrast the uniquely identifiable apartment which justifies the cataphoric *the* in:

I am just about to move into *the* apartment directly above yours.
 The indefinite article is commonly associated with 'first mention' of an item with which anaphoric *the* would be used in subsequent mention:

Her house was burgled and she lost *a* camera, *a* radio, and *a* purse – though fortunately *the* purse contained very little money and *the* camera was insured.

NOTE [a] Body parts which are multiple can be individually referred to with the indefinite article:

Jack has broken *a* finger/*a* rib.

but

Jack has bumped *his* head.

[b] While identical noun phrases with *the* are taken to be coreferential, this is not the case when the article is indefinite:

Mary bought *the* camera from her sister and she has now sold *the* camera to me. [1]
 Mary bought *a* camera last week and sold *a* camera this week. [2]

In [1], only one camera is involved; in [2], the presumption is that reference is made to two different cameras.

[c] Note also the use of zero with complements of some verbs:

She turned linguist. ~ She became a linguist.
 They made him chairman.

The indefinite article and the numeral one

5.16 We often use the indefinite article in ways that reflect its origin as an unstressed variant of the numeral. In such cases, *one* could replace *a/an* with only a slight implication of greater emphasis:

Our neighbours have two daughters and { *a* } son.

This cost { *a* } pound / { *a* } hundred / thousand / million { *one* } pounds.

Compare also variant phrases in which *one* is used when a conjunction follows:

We walked for { *a* } mile or two.
 { *one* } or two miles.

The water is only { *a* } foot and a half deep.
 { *one* } and a half feet deep.

NOTE

In phrases of measure like 'half *an* hour', 'ten dollars *a* day', the numerical function cannot be fulfilled by *one* without expansion and recasting: 'ten dollars for *one* day'.

The zero article

Zero article and some/any

5.17 With noncount and plural count nouns, the role of indefinite article is fulfilled by either zero or (where quantification is to be expressed) *some* or its nonassertive (2.11) analogue *any*:

Do you know what { *a* } boysenberry looks like?

She bought her son { *an* } apple.
 { *some* } apples.

I like milk with my coffee.

I would like *some* milk with my coffee, please.

He hasn't bought *any* books for years, whereas she spends half her salary on books.

She has men as well as women on her staff.

If we inserted *some* before both *men* and *women* in this last sentence, there would be little difference in meaning. But if we inserted *some* before one and not before the other, it would give the impression that this indicated the minority:

She has men as well as *some* women on her staff.

But the greater generality of zero as compared with *some* must not lead us to confound this general use of zero with the generic use which we shall consider in 5.22. Compare:

Quantitative: *Some* coffee will calm this nervousness of yours.

General: Coffee can be bought almost anywhere.

Generic: Coffee is a common stimulant.

Zero article with definite meaning

5.18 Despite its widespread correspondence to the indefinite article, the zero article can, conversely, be used in ways that closely resemble the definite article. This is notably so where a phrase specifies a unique role or task. In the following examples, the parenthesized *the* could be present or absent with very little difference of meaning:

Maureen is (*the*) captain of netball this year.

As (*the*) chairman, I must rule you out of order.

The speaker will be Mr Watanabe, (*the*) author of a recent book on international affairs and of course (*the*) presenter of several TV talk shows.

Although she declined the position of director, she accepted the role of unofficial adviser.