Mistakes in the use of articles

ESL students make several mistakes while writing English. Interestingly, most of these mistakes are not all that serious and can be avoided easily. Here is a quick overview of common mistakes in the use of articles.

Two kinds of articles

As you know, there are two kinds of articles in English – definite article (the) and indefinite article (a/an).

While mistakes in the use of articles are not exactly serious, they indicate a lack of proficiency in English.

Here is a quick overview of the most important rules that you have to remember when using definite and indefinite articles.

Indefinite articles

1. Use indefinite articles (a, an) when you introduce a person or thing for the first time.

2. Use indefinite articles when you don't expect the reader/listener to understand who or what you are talking about.

3. Use the definite article to refer to a person or thing that has already been mentioned.

4. Use the definite article to refer to a person or thing known to both the writer and the reader.

5. Do not use any articles when you are speaking in general.

6. A singular countable noun must have an article or another determiner with it. A determiner can be a possessive (my, his), a demonstrative (this, that) or a quantifier (some, any, few etc).

7. A plural noun can be used with or without an article. Note that no article is used when we are speaking in general.

Now test your understanding of these rules. Correct the sentences given below.

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1. Last Sunday, my husband took me to the good restaurant.

2. I live in the small apartment in the suburbs.

3. There is the park near my school. There are some beautiful paths in a park.

4. Remember a movie we watched last week?

Answers

1. Last Sunday, my husband took me to a good restaurant.

2. I live in a small apartment in the suburbs.

3. There is a park near my school. There are some beautiful paths in the park.

4. Remember the movie we watched last week?