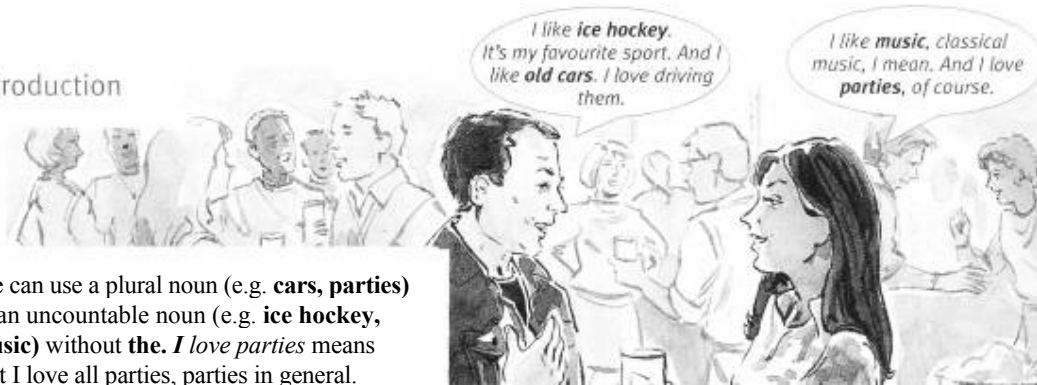


## 86 Cars or the cars?

### A Introduction

We can use a plural noun (e.g. **cars, parties**) or an uncountable noun (e.g. **ice hockey, music**) without **the**. *I love parties* means that I love all parties, parties in general.



### B General and specific meanings

#### GENERAL

A plural noun or an uncountable noun on its own has a general meaning.

***Cars** are expensive to buy.*

***Elephants** are intelligent animals.*

*I don't understand **computers**.*

(= all computers, computers in general)

*You always need **money**.*

***Glass** is made from sand.*

*I'm quite fond of **curry**.*

*Natasha is studying **music**.*

(= all music, music in general)

#### SPECIFIC

**The** + plural noun or uncountable noun has a specific meaning.

***The cars** had both broken down.*

*We saw **the elephants** at the zoo.*

***The computers** crashed at work today.*

(— the specific computers at my workplace)

*Laura put **the money** in her purse.*

*David swept up **the broken glass**.*

***The curry** was delicious, thank you.*

***The music** was too loud. (= the music at a specific time, at a party for example)*

A phrase or clause after the noun often shows that it is specific.

*Look at **the oil on your sweater**. **The apples you gave me** were nice.* But the nouns in these sentences have a general meaning.

*I hate **people who never say hello**. **Life in the old days** was hard.*

*Life in the old days* is still a general idea, not a specific life.

A phrase with *of* usually takes **the**. Compare these two structures.

*a book on **Irish history**    a book on **the history of Ireland***

### Special uses of the

We use **the** + singular noun to make general statements about animals and about inventions and discoveries.

***The tiger** can swim.    **The fly** is a common insect.*

*Who invented **the camera**?    **The electron** is a part of every atom.*

Here **the tiger** means all tigers, tigers in general. We use this structure mainly in written English. In speech, *Tigers can swim* is more usual.

We also use **the** with musical instruments. (But for American English see page 379.)

*Natasha can play **the piano, the violin and the clarinet**. We do not use **the** with sports.*

*Shall we play **tennis**? NOT ~~Shall we play the tennis?~~ Note that we listen to **the radio** but normally watch television.*

## 86 Exercises

### 1 He likes golf (A)

Look at the pictures and say what people like. Use these objects: *art, chemistry, chips, dogs, golf*



► He likes golf.

- |   |   |    |
|---|---|----|
| 1 | 3 | .. |
| 2 | 4 | .. |

### 2 General and specific meanings (B)

Complete the conversations. Put in the nouns and decide if you need *the*.

- Tom: Did you see *the football* (football) on television last night?  
 Melanie: No, I hate *football* (football). I was watching *the news* (news) on the other channel.
- 1 Rachel: Did your family have a dog when you were younger?  
 Vicky: No, thank goodness. I'm afraid of..... (dogs). I didn't like  
 .....(dogs) that were running around in the park yesterday. I was afraid  
 they were going to attack me.
- 2 Melanie: You shouldn't drive so much, Mark. You know that..... (cars)  
 cause .....(pollution), don't you?  
 Mark: Yes, but ..... (cars) these days are cleaner than they used to be.  
 Isn't it.....(aeroplanes) that are mainly responsible  
 for..... (pollution) of the atmosphere?
- 3 Melanie: I've put some bread out in the garden for ..... (birds).  
 Tom: You like ..... (birds), don't you?  
 Melanie: Yes, I do. I love ..... (wildlife), in fact. I'd much rather live in the  
 country if I could.
- 4 Laura: You're always reading books about ..... (history), aren't you?  
 Harriet: It was always my favourite subject. Do you know anything  
 about ..... (history) of this area?  
 Laura: No, but if you like looking round ..... (museums) and  
 .....(old buildings), we could find out about it together.

### 3 Special uses of the (C)

Put in the correct noun and decide if you need *the*.

Use these nouns: *atom, football, guitar, radio, telescope, television*

- I was listening to a phone-in on *the radio*.
- Rutherford split..... in 1911.
  - Tom and his friends played..... in the park.
  - Mike is quite musical. He can play.....
  - The children spend a lot of time watching .....
  - Galileo developed..... for use in astronomy.