

## WEEK 4 – LEÇON 1: THE ARTICLES IN FRENCH

**Warning:** Well, this is a tough one, and I don't know how to put it. Okay...I will confess: Dear Frenchtastic members, I seriously wish I could skip this lesson because there is almost *nothing* to teach about the French articles. I can tell you that you must use le/un [the/a] before a masculine noun, la/une [the/a] before a feminine one, but I may *never* be able to tell you exactly why you must use **le** or **la**, **un** or **une** in the first place in front of an object or a concept.

Seriously, why don't we have in French words like THE or A/AN in English to represent the definite and indefinite articles??? Why do we say things like "la table" (the table) and le tonnerre (the thunder)? What makes the table feminine and the thunder masculine? I have absolutely no clue! It is simply arbitrary! And this is very frustrating, even for the native speaker that I am. It's not that I have any trouble using articles, but I find it hard to teach it to non-native speakers. Most of what I know about French articles, I know it because I happen to be born and raised in a family where people speak French all the time. So I know *de facto* that we use la/une in front of table (table) and le/un for tonnerre (thunder) but don't ask me why. It will break my heart☹. I don't see *anything* feminine about the table sitting in front of me right now in my room, nor did I see *anything* masculine about the thunder rumbling during the storm some time ago. Yes, I was a bit scared, but that was it!

Sorry, guys. I did not want to bother you with my silly concerns today, but I just needed to voice the frustration that I feel each time I have to explain this lesson. Anyway, since I definitely have to teach *something* about the definite and indefinite articles in French for this class, I'm going to tell you everything my school teachers taught me about them. But a dictionary will be a better teacher for this topic. Make it your best companion. And if you ever get mixed up someday and use le instead of la in a conversation, it is okay. Native French speakers will still find it very cute. ☺ Alors, bonne chance à tous!

**Goal:** Actually, no real goal here, just do your best to memorize the "assumed" gender for every noun you would like to use in a sentence and apply an article to them accordingly.

### A- THE DEFINITE ARTICLES IN FRENCH

We call them les articles définis in French. There are 4 of them:

#### 1- How do we use them?

- **le:** it is used before nouns [person-thing/object-concept/idea] having a masculine gender.
- **la:** it is used before nouns [person-thing/object-concept/idea] having a feminine gender.
- **les:** it is used before nouns [person-thing/object-concept/idea] having a masculine gender or a feminine gender in the plural form.
- **l':** it is used before nouns [person-thing/object-concept/idea] which begin with a vowel or a silent "h" (called "*h muet*" in French). ( I will explain this in my youtube channel)

#### Now a few examples:

Le : Le garçon (the boy)/ le chien (the male dog)/le tableau (the board)/le désespoir (despair)  
La : fille (the girl)/la chienne (the female dog)/ la tasse (the cup)/la beauté (beauty)  
Les : les filles (the girls)/les chiens (the dogs)/ les tableaux (the boards)/les beautés (beauties).  
L': l'acteur (the actor)/l'actrice (the actress)/l'homme (the man)/ l'humour (humor)

## 2- When do we use them?

1) Use **these definite articles to make a noun specific within a group**. Usually, this is followed by a description of the noun. For example, there are 5 football players on a field and there is one of them that you particularly like. You are showing him or her to your friend (from a distance). And let's say your favorite player is holding a ball at that very moment. You can say: Le joueur qui tient la balle [the player that is holding the ball].

2) When you **already know what you are referring to in sentence**. You and your roommate own a dog in your apartment. When referring to your dog to him, used le or la (chien/chienne for male/female dog) since it is clear that you both know already what dog this is about.

3) When the noun you are referring to is **unique in its category**, therefore there cannot be any confusion by using a definite article. For example, since there can't be two presidents of a republic at any one moment (as a rule), you say "le président". Everyone knows who you are referring to.

4) **Nouns used in a generic manner will take a definite article in French**. By generic, I mean things described in a general sense (In English, it actually the opposite that happens). For example, when naming school subjects, use le/la/les/and l': l'histoire (history)/les mathématiques (mathematics)/la géologie (geology). Also, for concept and ideas, please follow this same rule. For example, la vie (life)/la gourmandise (greed)/l'espoir (hope), etc.

Note: There are articles called contracted definite articles [au and du].

AU= à + le and DU = de + le. But we are not going to study them here since they require knowledge of other prepositions.

Important: Please note that there may be other circumstances when you should use the definite articles. This course just provides the most common situations of their uses.

## B- THE INDEFINITE ARTICLES IN FRENCH

We call them les *articles indéfinis* in French. There are 3 of them:

### 1- How do we use them?

- **un**: it is used before nouns [person-thing/object-concept/idea] having a masculine gender.

- **une**: it is used before nouns [person-thing/object-concept/idea] having a feminine gender.
- **des**: it is used before nouns [person-thing/object-concept/idea] having a masculine gender or a feminine gender in the plural form.

### Now a few examples:

Un garçon (a boy)/ un agent (a male agent)/un policier (a police officer)/un plan (a plan).  
 Une fille (a girl)/une agente (a female agent) une peur/ (a fear)/une chaise (a chair)  
 Des garçons (boys)/ des filles (girls)/ des peurs (fears)/ des chaises (chairs)

### 2- When do we use them?

- Use the indefinite articles in French to designate a random person/object** or when you simply don't feel the need to convey specific information about something/somebody. In sentence "C'est un chat"/this is a cat, there is no specific information about the cat I'm talking about.
- Use un/une/des when you have no previous knowledge of the person/thing you are describing.** For example, someone (a lady) would like to meet your boss. When introducing her to your boss, you can say, "Une dame voudrait vous rencontrer"/ a lady would like to meet you.

### A few general points about articles in French

- In French, adding an article in front of a job title is not always necessary.** Whereas you say in English, "I am a doctor"/ I am a pilot, you can simply drop the articles UN/UNE/DES in French and say simply: "Je suis docteur"/Je suis pilote". But remember, if you want to specify something, go ahead and use le/la/les/l'. For example, "I am the accountant of company X"/Je suis le comptable de la compagnie X. (because you are referring to a specific company).

- DES turns into DE whenever an adjective stands between DES and the noun it designates in a sentence. Consider this sentence (without an adjective):

J'ai **DES** chattes/ I have cats (female ones).

Now let's say, you want to indicate that you have nice female cats. In French, you'll say: J'ai DE jolies chattes/I have nice female cats, simply because "jolies" the adjective stands between the articles DES and "chattes". Des then becomes De. But if you place the adjective after the noun with nothing standing between the article DES and its noun, then no need to change DES into DE.

### Summary of this painful lesson:

*Bien, la leçon est maintenant terminée.* And I hope I did not make things even more complicated than they were before. What you should remember about definite and indefinite articles in

French is that, you can use them without mistake if the noun you are referring to is by nature feminine or masculine. Nouns such as homme (man), femme (woman, wife), boy (garçon), girl (fille), chien (male dog), chatte (female cat), guenon (female monkey) etc, can be easily associated with their proper articles. But when it comes to finding the proper articles for objects and concepts/ideas, you're on your own. So don't be afraid to use that bilingual dictionary. ☺