USES OF THE DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLE IN PORTUGUESE

This document is a reference sheet charting when and how the definite article and indefinite article are used or not used in Portuguese with nouns they qualify. The definite article corresponds to the English “the” and refers to a specific noun or nouns (e.g., “Have you laid the table?”) The indefinite article, corresponds to the English “a/an”. It can also translate as “some” or “any” in Portuguese. It refers to a non-specific noun or nouns (e.g., I bought a book)

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# USES OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

The definite article corresponds to the English “the” and is used to specify a noun or a name. It is formed thus:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | SINGULAR | PLURAL |
| MASCULINE | O | OS |
| FEMININE | A | AS |

Since the purpose of the definite article is to specify a noun, it must agree with the noun in **number and gender:**

# O carro A flor

# Os amigos As mulheres

# When the noun refers to mixed genders (masculine and feminine) as in “os amigos” (male and female friends) then the definite article is masculine.

**Os trabalhadores** nesta fábrica pertencem ao mesmo sindicato.

The workers [male and female] in this factory belong to the same union.

# THE DEFINITE ARTICLE WITH PERSONAL NAMES

The definite article is used with **personal or Christian names:**

**A Maria nunca chega a tempo.**

Maria never arrives on time.

**O Miguel sabe tudo de informática.**

Miguel knows everything about computer science.

It is also used when referring to people with **titles**:

**A doutora Ana Teresa está no consultório.**

Doctor Ana Teresa is in her surgery.

**O professor está de licença.**

The professor is on sabbatical.

A senhora Dona Maria de Fátima é gerente do ramo Banco Espírito Santo.

Dona Maria de Fátima is manager of the branch Banco Espírito Santo.

# OMISSION OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE WITH PERSONAL NAMES

The definite article is omitted before the names of **well-known or historical personages.**

**Sá de Miranda foi poeta do Renascimento português**.

Sá de Miranda was a poet of the Portuguese Renaissance.

THE DEFINITE ARTICLE WITH THE NAMES OF CONTINENTS AND COUNTRIES

The definite article is used with all the names of the **main continents**:

# A Europa

**A Ásia**

**A Austrália**

**A África**

**A América do Norte**

**A América do Sul**

The definite article is, strictly speaking, also used with most **countries** and **nation-states**, as in:

# Vladimir Putin é o primeiro-ministro da Rússia.

Vladimir Putin is the Prime Minister of Russia.

**A Noruega é o exportador principal de bacalhau**.

Norway is the main exporter of bacalhau.

However, **Portugal** and most **Portuguese-speaking countries** which were formerly part of the Portuguese Empire, with the exception of Brazil and Guiné-Bissau, do not take the definite article. Here is the full list:

# Portugal Cabo Verde São Tomé e Príncipe

**Angola Macau**

**Moçambique Timor**

Compare and contrast.

**Macau foi devolvido à China em 1999.**

**Vou ao Brasil por dois meses o ano que vem**.

# OTHER EXCEPTIONS

Certain other countries do not take the definite article. They are:

**Marrocos** (Morroco)

**Israel**

**Andorra**

Some other countries, namely **Inglaterra**, **Espanha**, **França**, **Itália** do not take the definite article **when used after a preposition**, as in: **a**, **de**, **em**, **para**, **por**.

Study the following examples:

**O último rei de Portugal morou em Inglaterra depois do exílio em 1910.**

**Muitos emigrantes portugueses foram para França na década de 60.**

**Vamos a Itália no mês que vem**.

THE DEFINITE ARTICLE WITH SEASONS OF THE YEAR, RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS AND CENTURIES

The definite article is used with seasons of the year:

**A Primavera** Spring

**O Verão** Summer

**O Outono** Autumn

**O Inverno** Winter

However, this does not apply when the seasons, preceded by a preposition such as **de**, function as a complemement to the main noun.

For example:

Estava uma noite **de verão** quando o meu namorado propôs casamento.

It was a summer’s night when my boyfriend proposed marriage.

Vou a cama cedo nos meses **de inverno**.

I go to bed early in the winter months.

# The definite article with religious festivals

The definite article is also used with religious festivals and observances:

**O Natal** Christmas

**A Páscoa** Easter

**A Quaresma** Lent

**O Advento** Advent

But this doesn’t apply when religious festivals and the like function as an adnominal adjunct to words such as **dia**, **noite** and **semana**.

Eu preparo o jantar no **dia de Natal**.

I cook the dinner on Christmas Day.

**Na semana de Páscoa** vou a casa dos meus pais.

I go to my parents’ house in Easter week.

# The definite article with centuries and epochs

The definite article is also used with centuries, decades and epochs: **O século** (century), **a época** (the era) o milénio

Portugal descobriu meio mundo durante **a época do Renascimento**.

Portugal discovered half the world during the era of the Renaissance.

O Brasil foi descoberto no início **do século XVI**.

O que vai acontecer **no novo milénio**?

What is going to happen in the new millennium?

Margaret Thatcher foi Primeiro-Ministro do Reino Unido ao longo **da década de 80**.

Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom throughout the eighties.

OMISSION OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE BEFORE DATES, MONTHS AND YEARS

The definite article is omitted before:

# Years

Pedro Álvares Cabral descobriu o Brasil **em 1500**.

Pedro Álvares Cabral discovered Brazil in 1500.

A monarquia portuguesa caiu **em 1910**.

The Portuguese monarchy fell in 1910.

# Months

Estamos **em Março**.

It’s March now.

A Primavera vem **em Abril**.

Spring arrives in April.

Vamos ao Algarve **em Agosto**.

We’re going to the Algarve in August.

# Dates

O semestre acaba **a 2 de Abril**.**\***

The semester ends on the 2nd of April.\*

Vamos aos Estados Unidos **a 15 de Julho**.\*

We’re going to the United States on July 15.

\* Don’t be fooled by the **a** here. This is not the definite article but a proposition of time, corresponding to the English **on** when used with dates.

**Also note**:

O semestre acaba **no dia** 2 de Abril.

Vamos aos Estados Unidos **no dia** 15 de Julho.

And also, the omission of the definite article doesn’t apply when talking about **celebrated or historical dates**.

**O 25 de Abril** é o aniversário da Revolução dos Cravos.

The 25th April is the anniversary of the Revolution of the Carnations.

**O 10 de Junho** é o Dia de Camões.

The 10th of June is Camões Day.

THE DEFINITE ARTICLE BEFORE POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVES AND PRONOUNS

The possessives (**meu**, **teu**, **seu**, **nosso**) should be **preceded by** **the definite article**:

Perdi **os meus óculos**.

I’ve lost my glasses.

Já fez **o seu trabalho** de casa?

Have you done your homework?

But, if referring to **members of your family**, you can omit it:

**Minha** **irmã** mora em Alemanha.

My sister lives in Germany.

**Meu pai** é engenheiro

My father is an engineer.

However, this does not apply to **relatives in the plural**:

**Os meus pais** moram perto da minha casa.

My parents live near my house.

**Os meus primos** vêm hoje.

My cousins are coming today.

You can also omit the definite article after the verb **ser:**

Essa revista **é seu?**

Is that magazine yours?

It is also omitted in very formal or religious addresses:

**Pai Nosso**, que está no céu…

Our father, who art in heaven…

Also with **Nosso Senhor**, **Vossa Excelência** and so on.

There are a number of standard expressions, using the possessive, where the definite article is omitted. Study the following examples:

# a seu prazer

**por minha vontade**

**em meu poder**

**a meu ver**

**por minha causa**

**a meu cargo**

Eu faço todo **por minha vontade**.

I do everything because I want to/of my own free will.

Eu teria feito o mesmo **em seu lugar**.

I would have done the same in your place.

Eles adiaram a data da reunião **por minha causa**.

They put off the date of the meeting for my sake.

Não fica **em meu poder** mandar nele.

It’s not in my power to order him about.

# THE OMISSION OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE BEFORE NOUNS

The definite article can be omitted before nouns in the following circumstances:

1. When we wish to indicate that the noun is of a **general or**

**abstract** nature:

É uma questão **de justiça**.

It’s a question of justice.

Deixe-me **em paz**.

Leave me in peace.

2. When a series of nouns are enumerated within a sentence:

Quando viaja amanhã, verifica que tem o seguinte: **passaporte**, **visto**, **bilhete**, **cheques de viagem** e **dinheiro** para o imposto do aeroporto.

When you set off tomorrow, make sure that you’ve got the following: passport, visa, ticket, travellers’ cheques and money for the airport tax.

Quero comprar tudo que há no butique: **vestidos**, **saias**, **blusas**, **sapatos**...

I want to buy everything in this boutique: dresses, skirts, blouses, shoes…

3. Before words which designate academic disciplines, languages or subjects you are studying, *if they are used with the following verbs*: aprender, entender, estudar, falar, saber and their synonyms:

Não **falo** **português** muito bem.

I don’t speak Portuguese very well.

Ando a **aprender inglês** na universidade.

I’m studying English in the University.

Hoje em dia menos alunos querem **estudar química** nas universidades.

Less students want to study chemistry at university nowadays.

4. Before the following nouns: **autorização**, **coragem**, **força**, **ocasião**, **valor** and **tempo** when they are complemented by the verbs **ter**, **dar** and **pedir**.

Não **tenho tempo** para fazer o que você quer.

I don’t have the time to do what you want.

Preciso **pedir autorização** da policia federal.

I need to ask for authorization from the federal police.

Peço que Deus me **dê coragem** para enfrentar estes problemas.

I’m praying that God will give me the courage to overcome these problems.

# THE INDEFINITE ARTICLE

The **indefinite article** corresponds to the English “**a**” and, as its name suggests, refers to an indefinite noun the exact nature of which is not specified. It is formed thus:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | SINGULAR | PLURAL |
|  | UM | UMA |
|  | UNS | UMAS |

As with the definite article, the indefinite article **must agree with the** **noun in number and gender**.

**Um amigo uma amiga**

# Um livro uma caneta

Não quero **uma sobremesa**.

I don’t want a dessert.

Comprei **um frango** para o nosso jantar.

I bought a chicken for our dinner.

# THE USE OF THE INDEFINITE ARTICLE IN THE PLURAL

The indefinite article in the plural mostly translates as the English “some” and is used in Brazilian Portuguese to mean “some”, but otherwise is not that much found, except in the following instances:

Roman Abramovich tem **uns grandes iates**.

Roman Abramovich has some huge yachts.

Ele tem **umas belas propriedades**.

He has some lovely properties.

Used in the plural, uns/umas can mean **around**, **approximately** when referring to numbers; it’s another way of saying “cerca de”

Houve **uns quarenta estudantes** na aula.

There were around forty students in the class.

NOTE: **Uns** is not usually used with **cem** or **mil**.

**Mil pessoas** participaram na manifestação.

A thousand people took part in the demonstration.

# OMISSION OF THE INDEFINITE ARTICLE

The indefinite article is not generally used in the following instances:

1. When the noun is used in the singular to denote a **part of**

**something**:

**Grande parte** do eleitorado fica insatisfeita com o governo.

The majority of the electorate are dissatisfied with the government.

2. It is not employed with a **noun used in a general sense in a**

**negative sentence**.

Não quero **sopa** nem **entrada**.

I don’t want soup or hors-d’oeuvres.

3. When the noun is preceded **by demonstrative words or other**

**qualifying adjectives** which indicate **identity or comparison**,

such as, for example, **igual**, **semelhante** and **tal**, or **certo**,

**qualquer**, **outro** and **tanto**.

Não devolveu **outro livro** que lhe emprestei.

He didn’t give back another book that I lent him.

**Qualquer coisa** que me pede, tentarei dar-lho.

Anything you ask me, I’ll try to give it to you.

Há **certo rapaz** que gosta de ti.

There’s a certain boy who likes you.

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by