

Determiners are particles placed before a noun phrase to define the thing. The most important determiner is the definite article **la** (the).

La — definite article

The particle **la** shows that the speaker is referring to a **certain thing which is known to the person being spoken to**.

Endings are not added to **la**, neither J nor N:

- la domo** = that house that is known to you
- la bela junulino** = that attractive young woman who is known to you
- la junulinoj** = those young women who are known to you
- la altaj montoj** = those high mountains that are known to you
- la ruĝajn kraĵonojn** = those red pencils that are known to you

In some cases, the **abbreviated apostrophe form l'** may be used.

La is placed before other epithets of the noun. If a **preposition** is present, it is placed before **la**.

- en la domo**
- ĉe la bela junulino**
- pri la altaj domoj**

Individuals

When talking about individual persons or things (not about **categories**), **la** means that the speaker supposes that the listener knows about the matter. **La** then means more or less "you know what I'm talking about".

The omission of **la** (or of another determiner) means that the speaker supposes that the listener does not know about the matter. Lack of a determiner more or less means "you don't know who (what) I'm talking about". The lack of a determiner can also mean that the identity is not important. Therefore the omission of **la** is just as important as the use of **la**.

La rozo apartenas al Teodoro. - The rose belongs to Theodor.

The speaker supposes that the listener can understand which rose is in question.

Al Teodoro apartenas rozo. - To Theodor belongs a rose.

Now it is a rose which the listener doesn't know.

Domo brulas! - A house is burning!

A single house is burning but the speaker isn't sure whether the listener knows which house is in question, or perhaps the speaker himself doesn't know which house is burning.

La domo brulas! - The house is burning!

The speaker wants to let us know that now a certain house is burning which the listener likely knows (maybe his home).

Venis multaj gastoj al via festo, ĉu ne? - Many guests came to your party, isn't that so?

Although the guests are certain individuals, here the phrase **multaj gastoj** only serves to inform about the number of guests. Their individual or group identity doesn't matter.

Previously mentioned

Normally something is known because it has been mentioned before. In that case, **la** means that something mentioned previously is being repeated. Non-use of **la** means that something new is being introduced into the story:

Mi havas grandan domon. La domo havas du etaĵojn. - I have a large house. The house has two stories.

At the first mention, the listener doesn't yet know which house is being referred to. Therefore, the speaker doesn't use **la**. At the second mention, the speaker adds **la** to show that the aforementioned house is being referred to. If **la** were not used there, the listener would have to assume that a different house is being referred to, or that the phrase is about a house in general (any house at all).

En tiu ĉi skatolo estas frukto. La frukto estas ronda. - There is fruit in this box. The fruit is round.

First, **frukto** (fruit; without **la**) introduces a new thing. The listener knows that a fruit is present in the box. Later, the speaker can continue talking about that same fruit using the words **la frukto** (the fruit).

Mi havas tri infanojn. La infanoj ofte ĝojigas min. - I have three children. The children often give me joy.

La shows that we are talking again about the previously mentioned children.

Sur la strato iris tri viroj. Ili aspektis kiel friponoj. Subite la tri friponoj malaperis en bankon. Ŝajnis, ke la banko estas prirabota. - Three men were walking on the street. They looked like crooks. Suddenly, the three crooks disappeared into a bank. It seemed that the bank was going to be robbed.

After the first mention of the three men, and the information that they looked like crooks, they can simply be called **la (tri) friponoj** (the

After the first mention of the three men, and the information that they looked like crooks, they can simply be called **la (tri) friponoj** (the three crooks). The phrase **la (tri) friponoj** serves, in this case, as a proper name for these three men. After the first mention of the bank, it may be called **la banko** (the bank).

It is not necessary to use the exact same words to be able to speak about the same thing with **la**:

Tre malproksime de ĉi tie loĝis reĝo, kiu havis dek unu filojn kaj unu filinon, Elizon. La dek unu fratoj iradis en la lernejon kun stelo sur la brusto kaj sabro ĉe la flanko. - Very far away from here lived a king who had eleven sons and one daughter, Eliza. The eleven brothers went to school with a star on their chest and a sabre at their side.

Although they were first mentioned using the word **filoj**, they can later be referred to as **la (dek unu) fratoj**.

Not directly mentioned, surmisable

Often something is known because another matter, previously mentioned, alludes to its existence, or because the listener has the necessary general knowledge.

Mi aĉetis aŭton, sed la motoro ne funkcias. - I bought a car but the motor doesn't work.

The motor itself was not previously mentioned, only the car, but because every car usually has a motor, the listener will understand that we're talking about the motor of the car just mentioned. One could also say **ĝia motoro** (its motor) which would be even clearer.

Mi manĝas per la buŝo kaj flaras per la nazo. - I eat with my mouth and smell with my nose.

The listener knows that the speaker is a person, and that a person has a mouth and a nose. **La buŝo** (the mouth) and **la nazo** (the nose) are therefore the same as **mia buŝo** (my mouth) and **mia nazo** (my nose). The word **la** could perhaps be left out, but in that case it would sound as if the listener doubted that a person has a mouth and a nose.

Fully described

A phrase can have an epithet or complement which makes it clear what is being talked about.

Jen kuŝas la ĉapelo de la patro. - Here lies the hat of the father.

The addition of **de la patro** makes it clear which hat is in question. We are led to understand that there is only one hat that belongs to the father. If we don't use **la** we would then suppose that it is one of several hats belonging to the father.

Por la hodiaŭa tago mi ricevis duoblan pagon. - For today, I received double pay.

The epithet **hodiaŭa** fully explains which day is being discussed.

Mi redonas al vi la monon, kiun vi pruntis al mi. - I am giving you back the money, which you loaned to me.

The phrase **kiun vi pruntis al mi** fully explains which money we are talking about.

Mi vojaĝis al la urbo Pekino. - I traveled to the city Beijing.

The name **Pekino** (Beijing) fully identifies the city.

Directly seen

Something may be known because the listener has directly seen it or otherwise noticed it.

La domo estas vere bela. - The house is really beautiful.

One can say it this way when the interlocutors have both seen the house.

La floroj odoras tre bone. - The flowers smell very good.

It can be said this way when the listener himself sees or smells the flowers and therefore easily understands which flowers are being talked about.

Generally known, unique

A thing can be known because it is totally unique, because only one thing like that exists, or because it is so significant or special that we could be referring only to it:

La ĉielo estas blua. - The sky is blue.

Everyone knows that a sky exists. It may therefore be called, simply, **la ĉielo** (the sky).

La prezidanto de Usono diris, ke... - The president of the United States said that...

The speaker supposes that the listener knows that the United States has a president, and only one. Therefore, it is possible simply to refer to **la prezidento de Usono**.

Categories

Often a noun is used to talk about a species, a type, or a category to say **kia** (what kind) it is. This can be done in various ways: without **la**, with **la**, singular or plural. Often it can be used in any form according to personal style or taste.

Most often determiners are used when talking about species, types, or categories. It is as if we regarded the whole species as one unknown

Most often determiners are used when talking about species, types, or categories. It is as if we regarded the whole unknown individual or example, or as an individual whose identity doesn't matter.

Leono estas besto. - A lion is an animal.

One wishes to say, that a lion is one of many species of animal, not a plant or other thing.

Rozo estas floro kaj kolombo estas birdo. - A rose is a flower and a dove is a bird.

These are types, not individuals.

Karlo estas kuracisto. - Charles is a doctor.

The word **kuracisto** does not serve to identify, but to say which profession Charles has.

Elizabeto estas patrino de tri infanoj. - Elisabeth is the mother of three children.

The phrase **patrino de tri infanoj** is used not to show who Elisabeth is, but to tell what kind of person she is.

Akvo bolas je cent gradoj. - Water boils at one hundred degrees Celsius.

One does not speak about a certain collection of water, but about the substance generally.

Sometimes we look at the species as one imaginary known individual and use **la**. This is quite common in a formal or philosophical style. On those occasions it is clear that the entire species is meant.

La gitaro estas tre populara instrumento. - The guitar is a very popular instrument.

A type of instrument is presented as if it were referring to a specific known instrument. Another possibility is: **Gitaro estas...**

La kato preferas varman klimaton. - The cat prefers a warm climate.

A type of animal is presented as one known individual animal. You could also say: **Kato preferas...**

La urso troviĝas kaj en Eŭropo kaj en Ameriko. - Bears are found both in Europe and in America.

The statement wouldn't be valid for a single bear. Therefore one can't say: **Urso troviĝas kaj en Eŭropo kaj en Ameriko.**

La saĝulo havas siajn okulojn en la kapo, kaj la malsaĝulo iras en mallumo. **La saĝulo = ĉiuj saĝuloj.** **La malsaĝulo = ĉiuj malsaĝuloj.**

- The wise man has his eyes in his head, and the fool walks in darkness. The wise man = all wise men. La fool = all fools.

If the noun is used as a predicate, then be sure not to use **la**, if we are only talking about the category: **Karlo estas advokato.** If we say **Karlo estas la advokato**, then the meaning is "Karlo is this certain lawyer whom you know" or "Karlo is this lawyer about whom we are speaking" or similarly.

If we refer to something countable then we can also represent the species or category with a plural word. When talking about species the difference between singular and plural is often inconsequential.

Leonoj estas bestoj. = **Leono estas besto.**

Rozoj estas floroj kaj kolomboj estas birdoj.

La leonoj estas bestoj.

La rozoj estas floroj kaj la kolomboj estas birdoj.

Prohibition of **la**

Don't use **la** with a sentence element which already has **another determiner**. Other determiners are **possessive pronouns**, **correlatives** ending in U, A or ES, the particle **ambaŭ**, and the **partially determining unu**:

Mia dorso doloras. - My back hurts.

Not: **La mia dorso doloras.** (But it is possible to say **la mia/via...**, if it is not followed by a noun.)

Tiu domo estas granda. - That house is big.

Not: **La tiu domo estas granda.**

Ĉiuj gastoj jam venis. - All the guests have already come.

Not: **Ĉiuj la gastoj jam venis.** Neither: **La ĉiuj gastoj jam venis.**

Mi ŝatas ĉiajn legomojn. - I like all kinds of vegetables.

Not: **Mi ŝatas la ĉiajn legomojn.**

Kies gasto mi estas, ties feston mi festas. - Whomever I am a guest of, that person's feast I celebrate.

Not: **La kies gasto... la ties festo...**

Mi legis ambaŭ librojn. - I read both books.

Not: **Mi legis la ambaŭ librojn.** Neither: **Mi legis ambaŭ la librojn.**

Don't use **la** before the **vocative**:

Don't use **la** before the **vocative**:

Kelnero, alportu al mi glason da biero! - Waiter, bring me a glass of beer!

Don't say: **La kelnero**, alportu...

La instead of a possessive pronoun

The word **la** (the) is often used instead of a **possessive pronoun**, if the context clearly shows who the owner is. This happens especially often when speaking about relatives and parts of the body:

Li levis **la kapon**. = Li levis sian kapon. - He lifted the head = He lifted his head.

Mi montris per **la fingro**, kien li iru. = ...per mia fingro... - I pointed with the finger where he should go. =...with my finger...

Ŝi lavis al si **la piedojn**. = Ŝi lavis siajn piedojn. - She washed to herself the feet. = She washed her feet.

Ĉu Karlo venis kun **la patro**? = ...kun sia patro? - Did Karlo come with the father? = ...with his father?

Diru al **la patro**, ke mi estas diligenta. La patro = mia patro (la patro de la parolanto)

- Tell the father that I am diligent. The father = my father (the father of the speaker).

However, often the words **Patro** and **Patrino** (with initial capital letter) is used without **la** as if it were a proper name.

La instead of ĉiuj

When there is no chance of misunderstanding you can use **la** instead of **ĉiuj**:

La gastoj eksidis ĉe la tablo. = Ĉiuj gastoj eksidis... - The guests took their seats at the table. =All guests took their seats...

Ĉi-vespere **la Angloj** prezentos teatraĵon en la kongresejo. **La Angloj** = ĉiuj Angloj. - This evening the English will present a play in the congress hall. The English = all English. (guests, participants etc)

The situation (congress) however limits the meaning of **ĉiuj Angloj**. We are talking about (more or less) all the English people who are participating in the congress, and not about all the English people in the world.

La before names of languages

La is used before names of languages that consist of an adjective and the word **lingvo** (language) (this word is often understood and left unstated). **La** is used because languages are seen as being unique: **la Angla** (lingvo), **la Ĉina** (lingvo), **la Nederlanda** (lingvo) etc. But **la** shouldn't be used with names of the few languages that have a name in the form of a noun, e.g. **Esperanto**, **Sanskrito**, **Ido**, **Volapuko** etc.

La before plej and malplej

With **plej** or **malplej**, we're normally talking about something unique so **la** is used:

La malfeliĉa infano forkuris kaj kaŝis sin en **la plej proksima arbaro**. - The unhappy child ran off kaj hid (himself/herself) in the nearest forest.

Li estas tre kredema: eĉ **la plej nekredoblajn aferojn**, kiujn rakontas al li **la plej nekredindaj homoj**, li tuj kredas. - He is very gullible: even the most incredible things that he is told by the most noncredible people, he believes right away.

When comparing two items or two groups then we usually use **la (mal)pli** instead of **la (mal)plej**:

Unu vidvino havis du filinojn. **La pli maljuna** (filino) estis tiel simila al la patrino per sia karaktero kaj vizaĝo, ke ĉiu, kiu ŝin vidis, povis pensi, ke li vidas la patrino. - One widow had two daughters. The oldest (daughter) was so similar to the mother in her character and face, that everyone who saw her could think that he saw the mother.

Sometimes **plej** does not present anything unique, but rather shows a higher level of quality or manner. In that case don't use **la**:

Eĉ **vulpo plej ruza** fine estas kaptata. - Even the slyest fox is caught in the end.

We are not talking about a certain, known fox, but about any fox that is extremely sly.

Li estas **plej laca** en la mateno. - He is most tired in the morning.

This is not a comparison between different people, but a comparison of the different types of tiredness of one person over time.

Kiu venas **plej frue**, sidas **plej ĝue**. - Whoever comes earliest, sits most pleasantly. (First come, first serve.)

Plej does not stand in front a noun sentence element but in front of an adverbial sentence element.

La with proper nouns

Do not use **la** with a words which are defined as proper nouns (names), because these names are clearly defined by themselves:

This is not a comparison between different people, but a comparison of the different types of tiredness of one person over time.

Kiu venas plej frue, sidas plej ĝue. - Whoever comes earliest, sits most pleasantly. (First come, first serve.)

Plej does not stand in front a noun sentence element but in front of an adverbial sentence element.

La with proper nouns

Do not use **la** with a words which are defined as proper nouns (names), because these names are clearly defined by themselves:

Pasintjare mi vojaĝis al Kanado. - Last year I traveled to Canada.

Don't say: ~~...al la Kanado.~~

Kie estas Francisko? - Where is Francisko?

Don't say: ~~Kie estas la Francisko?~~

With ordinary words that become proper nouns we usually do use **la** because those words are not of themselves defined.

Kaj tiam la Nokto diris: "Tenu vin dekstre kaj eniru en la malluman pinarbaron, mi vidis, ke tien foriris la Morto kun via malgranda infano." - And then Night said: "Keep to the right and go into the dark pine forest. I saw that Death went there with your little child."

In fables, night and death play the role of people with names (shown by the capitalization), but **nokto** and **morto** are ordinary nouns and require **la**.

When an ordinary proper noun has an adjective as epithet, and if this adjective is not itself part of the proper noun, we normally do use **la**. This is done mainly when there is a choice (real or imagined) among several things with the same name:

Duoble montriĝis la bildo de Venero, de la surtera Venero. - Twice is shown the picture of Venus, of the terrestrial Venus.

Venus is the proper name of a goddess. First **Venero** appears without **la** according to the basic rules for normal proper nouns. Then we have the epithet **surtera** (terrestrial) and we have to use **la** to show definiteness. It is as if there were two different Venuses, the heavenly Venus and the terrestrial Venus.

Ĉiuj konas Londonon, la ĉefurbon de Britio, sed ne ĉiuj konas la aliajn Londonojn en Usono kaj Kanado. - Everyone knows London, the capital of Britain, but not everyone knows the other Londons in the United States and Canada.

Londono (London) does not have **la**. The expression **aliaj Londonoj** (other Londons), however, has the epithet **aliaj** (other), and therefore also gets the word **la**.

Multaj vizitis Londonon, la ĉefurbon de Britio, sed mi vizitis ankaŭ aliajn Londonojn. - Many have visited London, the capital of Britain, but I have also visited other Londons.

Here also **Londono** has an epithet, but we don't use **la** because we are not dealing with all other Londons, and the listener also can't know precisely about which London we are talking.

Determiners other than **la** can appear before any kind of proper noun, but those types of expressions are rarely needed.

Ha, tie vi estas, mia Elizabeto! - Ah, there you are, my Elizabeth!

Ĉu vi sentas teruron antaŭ tiu Karolo? - Are you terrified of Karolo?

Partially determining unu

Some languages use a special indefinite article, which is often a word similar to the numeral **unu** (one). The word "a" is the indefinite article in English. However, an indefinite article doesn't exist at all in Esperanto. Complete indefiniteness is shown through simple non-use of a determiner. But some use **unu** as a **partially defining article**. This usage of **unu** doesn't show number, but individuality. It shows that we are referring to something that is **unknown to the listener, but known to the speaker**:

Unu vidvino havis du filinojn. - One widow had two daughters.

The beginning of a fable. At this point, only the storyteller knows the widow.

Unu vesperon fariĝis granda uragano. - One evening there was a large hurricane.

The partially defining article **unu**, however, is never required. It adds nuance, and it can be used according to need.