ARTICLES (A, AN, THE): WORKSHEET
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Exercises

1. ______(a) decline and fall of ______(b) Roman Empire.

2. ______(a) complexity of ______(b) problem of ______(c) decline and fall of the Roman Empire is made evident by ______(d) wide variety of causes that are emphasized in varying degrees by ______(e) different authors.

3. Fortunately, ______(a) concise formulation of Edward Gibbon serves as ______(b) widely accepted basis for ______(c) modern discussion of ______(d) problem.

4. According to Gibbon, ______(a) empire reached its peak during ______(b) administration of ______(c) two Antonines.

5. After that, however, ______(a) extent of ______(b) Roman conquest became too great to be managed by ______(c) Roman government, and ______(d) decline began.

6. ______(a) military government was weakened and finally dissolved as ______(b) barbarians were allowed to constitute ______(c) ever-growing percentage of ______(d) Roman legions.

7. ______(a) victorious legions began to dominate and corrupt ______(b) government, weakening it at ______(c) time when it most needed ______(d) strength to overcome ______(e) other problems.
Answers and Explanations to the Exercises
NOTE: The explanations refer to reasons given in the Is it Definite? handout.

1. a) The—singular; definite because of reason 4 (following modification: of the Roman Empire).
   b) the—singular; definite because of the preceding adjective: Roman. This is not one of the five principal sources of definiteness, but in this case, “Roman empire” is very specific (especially since “Roman” is derived from the proper noun, “Rome”), and the reader would be expected to know that there was only one empire that is known as the Roman empire in English.

2. a) The—singular; definite because of reason 4 (following modification: of the problem…).
   b) the—singular; definite because of reason 4 (following modification: of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire).
   c) the—singular; definite because of reason 4 (following modification: of the Roman Empire).
   d) the or a—singular; could be either definite or indefinite. Even though a long string of modifiers follows the noun, the reader still might not be familiar with the variety of causes that the writer is referring to.
   e) 0—plural; indefinite because the reader has no way of knowing which different authors the writer is referring to.

3. a) the—singular; definite because of reason 4 (following modification: of Edward Gibbon).
   b) a—singular; indefinite because there could be more than one widely accepted basis for modern discussion of the problem (the modification is not sufficient to make the noun unique).
   c) 0—uncountable; indefinite. can be either countable or uncountable; here it is being used in the abstract, uncountable sense. It is indefinite because there could be more than one modern discussion of the problem (the modification is not sufficient to make the noun unique).
   d) the—singular; definite because of reason 1 (previously mentioned).

4. a) the—singular; definite because of reason 1 (previously mentioned).
   b) the—singular; definite because of reason 4 (following modification: of the two Antonines).
   c) the or 0—plural; could be either definite or indefinite. The writer’s use of the indicates that there were two and only two Antonine emperors. Use of 0 would indicate that there were more than two Antonine emperors.

5. a) the—singular; definite because of reason 4 (following modification: of the Roman conquest).
   b) the—Conquest in this context is uncountable, meaning “the area or territory which was conquered.” Because the preceding adjective, Roman, is derived from a proper name (Rome), it makes the following noun unique in this context.
   c) the—singular; definite. As in 5b, the preceding adjective, Roman, makes it clear which government is referred to in this context. However, note that in another context, it might be necessary to add a following modification in order to make the noun definite (e.g., “the Roman government of the third century A.D.”)
   d) the—singular; definite because of reason 1 (previously mentioned).
6. a) The—singular; definite because of reasons 1 and 5 (Roman government was previously mentioned, and it is clear from the context that military government is also referring to the Roman government).
   b) 0—plural; indefinite (not previously mentioned, nor is there any other source of definiteness).
   c) an—singular; indefinite. There could be more than one group, other than the barbarians, who constituted ever-growing percentages of the Roman legions; thus, modification is not sufficient to make the noun definite.
   d) the—plural; definite. As in 5b and 5c, the preceding adjective, Roman, is sufficient to make it clear which legions are being referred to in this context. In another context, additional modification might be required to make the noun definite (e.g., “the Roman legions that invaded Britain in 6 B.C.”)

7. a) 0—plural; probably indefinite. The author is not necessarily referring to any particular group of victorious legions; moreover, even though legions have been mentioned before, victorious legions have not; thus, the criterion of previous mention does not apply.
   b) the—singular; definite because of reason 1 (previously mentioned).
   c) a or the—singular; If we interpret when it most needed… as modifying time, then time is definite because of reason 4. However, most native speakers interpret both at a time and when it most needed… as adverbial modifiers modifying weakening, so the the noun would be interpreted as being indefinite.
   d) the or 0—Strength can be either uncountable (the abstract quality of strength) or singular (a particular instance of that abstract quality). So it is either singular and definite because of reason 4 (following modification: to overcome other problems), or uncountable and indefinite. Both would be equally acceptable, so it just depends on how the writer is thinking.
   e) 0—plural; indefinite (other problems have not been mentioned previously, and there is no other source of definiteness).