

ARTICLES (A, AN, THE): WORKSHEET

Developed by the Center for Global Communication and Design
Revised 06/26/2018

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*.

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Answers and Explanations to the Exercises

NOTE: The explanations refer to reasons given in the [Is it Definite?](#) handout.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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).
- 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.
- 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).

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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 Britian 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).