Fun for all the Family 3- Quite a few games for articles and determiners

Articles in English is one of those grammar points that are fairly easy to explain the fundamentals of, but even Advanced learners can make quite "basic" mistakes with and almost no one can learn all the special little rules for. As correction of spoken errors seems to have little effect on the accuracy of this grammar point for most people, the best approach is often to:

1. Tackle this grammar point as early as possible in a light way
2. Come back to it quite often, adding a little more information to the rules each time (e.g. first time "much" and "many", and the next time add "lots of" etc.); and
3. Repeat twice a year for many many years, with occasional correction in between to remind the students of what they have learnt.

All the above means you will need loads of game ideas to keep this grammar point fun and motivating, and those games will need to be useable at all different kinds of ages from 4 (introducing "a", and maybe "an") to 104. This makes articles (and the larger group of determiners) an especially good grammar point to look at in a "Fun for all the family" way.

The philosophy of this article, as with others in the "Fun for all the Family" series, is that giving ages for games is an arbitrary division that a good teacher will be able to completely ignore when choosing games depending on the characters, language levels, energy levels, preferred learning styles and previous activities of the particular mix of students they have in their own individual classes. The activities below are therefore suitable for various age ranges from pre-school kids to retirees:

1. **Article Stations**. Students listen to the teacher (or look at a flashcard with a word, sentence or picture on it) and run and touch something that represents the correct article for what they hear or see, e.g. they touch the left wall for "an" when the teacher says "apple" and the right wall for "a" for "pineapple", or touch the floor for "the" when you say "teacher" (only one in the class) and the tops of their desks for "a" when you say "window" (touching one of several). This game is also suitable for practising "some"/ "any", "much"/ "many" etc. To make the game purpose clearer, write the articles you wish to practice on A4 pieces of paper and stick them to the things the students have to touch, e.g. the walls.
2. **Guess the true article**. Students make true sentences about themselves that you

would need to guess something about their life to know and see if the other students can guess the right missing word e.g. "My bedroom is _____room on the second floor" would have the word "the" missing if there is only one room there and the word "a" missing if there are two or more rooms on that floor, and "There are _____ books on floor of my bedroom" would depend on how untidy and how much of a bookworm they think their partner is. This game also works for "some"/ "lots of"/ "hardly any"/ "no" etc. Students will probably need quite a lot of help and perhaps a worksheet to do this activity in pairs, and you might want to prepare your own sentences in advance if you are doing it as a whole class, teacher lead activity.

3. **Guess from the article**. This is similar to the Guess the True Article game above, but this time you give the article and the students guess the object(s), e.g. "In my house the _____ is on the piano".

4. **Guess the number of articles**. After students have read or listened to a text, get them to guess the number of times a particular word was used in it, e.g. "the". They then listen or read again and check. This works very well with pop songs.

5. **Listen only for the articles**. A fun way of mixing up the order of how teachers usually do things with a text in class (listen for general comprehension, listen for specific information, listen for a particular grammatical form), get students to listen the first time only for how many times a particular word in used, e.g. "a". After they have had a couple of times to listen to it for this simple task, the comprehension questions you go onto later should be easier for them than if they had to do them when listening the first time. If you also do another different language point with the same text after the comprehension questions, this is also a good way of revising one grammar point with a text and also doing something new, and so saving classroom time.

6. **Find the articles race**. Students race to circle as many of one kind of article or determiner (e.g. "few") as they can in a text or whole magazine in 2 minutes. You can combine this game with the Guess the Number of Articles prediction game above by allowing different teams to choose different determiners they are going to look for (e.g. one team chooses to search for "some" and the other team chooses to search for "any" at the same time) by which one they think there will be most of. When the game is finished, you can then talk about which article there were more of in the text and why- possibly leading on to a grammar explanation.

7. **Articles hints**. Students guess which country or city is being described from clues with articles, e.g. "The tallest building has "<u>the</u>" in its name" (Answer:

New York, from "The Empire State Building"), or "<u>A</u> river with "<u>the</u>" in the name runs through it" (Answer London, from "The River Thames") etc. If you want to do it as a team game or group activity, you will probably need to prepare information cards for suitable cities or let the students have access to an English language encyclopaedia (also available online through Wikipedia etc.)

8. **Articles picture difference**. Draw two pictures with some differences in the number of each thing in each picture, e.g. two dogs in one picture and one in the other. Make sure at least one of the multiple objects in one of the pictures is in the same position doing the same thing as in the picture with only one of that object, e.g. in the first picture one of the dogs in jumping on the table and the other is doing nothing, and in the second picture the only dog is jumping on the table. Without showing their picture to each other or saying the number of objects in the picture, the students have to find the differences between the two pictures by using sentences like "A dog is jumping" (if there is more than one dog in the picture) or "The dog is jumping" (if there is just one). If you also add several dogs doing the action and/ or have no dogs you can also add practice of "some" and/ or "any".

9. **Articles Picture dictation**. To practice the language in a similar way to Articles Picture Difference but with less preparation for the teacher and more intensive listening practice for the students, describe a picture with sentence like "<u>Some</u> apples are in the bowl but <u>an</u> apple is on the floor" and "<u>The</u> fish is swimming from left to right". When the students have drawn the picture you are describing, you can get them to describe what they have drawn using the same language.

10. **Articles picture drawing race**. Students draw what they hear like in Articles Picture Dictation above, but in this game they race to be the first to draw the sentence you say, e.g. "A few apples are in the box, but most are on the floor". The first student or team with a picture representing what is said is the winner (artistic merit not important!)

11. **Articles Find the picture**. In a similar way to Articles Picture Difference, students search for a picture you describe using "a" or "the" and/ or "some" and "any" depending on the number of objects and how many of them are in that position or doing that thing, e.g. "There are some smiling people". You can play the game with them finding which of a group of pictures you have prepared matches the sentence, or searching through a book or magazine for something similar.

12. **Articles Run and touch**. When the teacher says "Touch <u>the</u>" and stops speaking,

students run and touch anything that article is suitable for, e.g. touching <u>the</u> whiteboard   or <u>the</u> floor is okay, but touching <u>a</u> desk is not (because there are many in the class). This game is also good for "lots of", "a" and "an" (both contrast to "the" and contrast between "a" and "an"), "some" and "a few". For a less active version with older students or in a more restrictive classroom, you can get them to point at the object or pretend to shoot it instead.

13. **Articles memory game**. Students close their eyes and listen to a sentence about the classroom or a picture they have been looking at with the article taken out, e.g. "____ long ruler is one the teacher's desk." Students have to guess the right article from memory of the scene and grammatical knowledge.

14. **Articles Memory game correct the sentence**. The same as Articles Memory Game, students close their eyes and listen to sentences about the room, but this time the person speaking sometimes deliberately makes a mistake with the articles (either a grammatical mistake or saying something that isn't true in the classroom or picture being described) and students have to correct them.

15. **Word by word hangman**. This game is a good way of making students predict when a determiner is coming up in the sentence, and so practice being able to hear it and notice it when it is used, and eventually gain the ability to use it more often themselves. Give students the first word of a sentence and ask them to guess the next word. If they are correct, write the word up. If they are wrong, still write the correct next word up, but draw one part of the hangman on the board. The students then try to guess the next word etc. Continue until the whole sentence or text is complete and the man is safe, or until the hangman is complete and the students lose. To make the task easier, you can use a sentence that describes something that they can see, or a sentence they have used recently in their books or a speaking activity. Most sentences contain a determiner, but even if the one you have chosen does not (e.g. "The man went to prison"), you can discuss why it does not.

16. **Letter by letter hangman**. This is similar to Word by Word Hangman, but this time students guess which the next letter is each time. Note that unlike normal hangman, the letters are guessed in order through the sentence and students only get one guess at each letter before the answer to that letter is given.

17. **Shout out the article**. This is an anticipation game similar to the two variations of hangman above, but with a bit more excitement and pressure to think in real time. Students listen to you slowly reading out a text and shout out "A!" etc. when they think that will be the next word. You can play the game with just one

kind of article, with many kinds of article, or with each team shouting out a different article. Take away points for students shouting out at the wrong point.

18. **Pairwork articles gap fill challenge**. After finishing comprehension questions with a reading or listening text, get students to read each other sentences from it with one word they have chosen taken out, e.g. "Jane Saunders always feels tired by ____ end of the week". People in the same group or a different team then have to try and guess the missing word with help of their memories and grammatical knowledge. The fact that students are challenging each other means they get much more involved in this task than if it was a textbook gap fill. You can tell them which kinds of words they can take out, but students usually choose quite a few determiners anyway, because they know it is difficult for the other students to guess.

19. **Articles grammar auction**. Play grammar auction (students try to outbid the other students for sentences that are grammatically correct while avoiding sentences that have mistakes, with the aim of buying the most correct sentences within the total money limit you have set them by the end of the game) with sentences illustrating the grammar of articles, e.g. some sentences as they are from the textbook, and some textbook sentences changed to include grammatical errors.