

The Definite Article ال

A 'definite article' is a word used before a noun to indicate that the identity of the noun is known (THE city, not just any city... THE student, not just any student... etc.).

An 'indefinite article' indicates the identity of the noun is unknown, or we don't care to specify (A city, A student, etc.).

The word 'the' in Arabic is not an actual word, but rather a marker that signifies a definite noun. The marker is: ال and it attaches to a word. We normally translate it as 'the,' but not always. For instance, some place names in Arabic have the ال in the word, such as العراق al-Iraq is just 'Iraq' in English (not The Iraq).

In English we have the word 'the' and we have the word 'a'. In Arabic, we either have ال or we don't.

Definite = ال

Indefinite = no ال

المدينة = the city. [definite noun]

There is no word for 'a' in Arabic.

مدينة = a city [indefinite noun]

Think of no ال as meaning 'a' - for instance:

مدينة = a city

طالبة = a student

ولاية = a state