

**Unit 74** Plural and uncountable nouns with and without the  
(flowers/the flowers, music/the music)

**a** We don't use **the** before a noun when we mean something in general:

- I love **flowers**. (*not* 'the flowers')  
(**flowers** = flowers *in general*, not a particular group of flowers)
- I'm afraid of **dogs**.
- **Doctors** are paid more than **teachers**.
- **Crime** is a problem in most big cities. (*not* 'the crime')
- **Life** has changed a lot since I was a boy. (*not* 'the life')
- I prefer **classical music** to **pop music**. (*not* 'the classical/pop music')
- Do you like **English food** / **French cheese** / **Swiss chocolate**? (*not* 'the ...')
- My favourite subject at school was **history/physics/English**.
- I like **football/athletics/skiing/chess**.
- Do you collect **stamps**?

We say **most people** / **most dogs** etc. (*not* 'the most ...'):

- **Most people** like George. (*not* 'the most people' - see also **Unit 82**)

**b** We say **the ...** when we mean *something in particular*:

- I like your garden. **The flowers** are beautiful. (*not* 'Flowers are ...')  
(**the flowers** = the flowers in your garden, not flowers in general)
- **Children** learn a lot from playing. (= children in general)  
*but*: We took **the children** to the zoo. (= a particular group of children, perhaps the speaker's own children)
- **Salt** is used to flavour food.  
*but*: Can you pass **the salt**, please? (= the salt on the table)
- I often listen to **music**.  
*but*: The film wasn't very good but I liked **the music**. (= the music in the film)
- All **cars** have wheels.  
*but*: All **the students** in the class like their teacher.
- Are **English people** friendly? (= English people in general)
- but*: Are **the English people** you know friendly? (= only the English people you know, not English people in general)

**c** The difference between 'something in general' and 'something in particular' is not always very clear. Study these sentences:

- I like working with **people**. (= people in general)
- I like working with **people who are lively**. (not all people, but **people who are lively** is still a general idea)  
*but*: I like **the people I work with**. (= a particular group of people)
- Do you like **coffee**? (= coffee in general)
- Do you like **strong black coffee**? (not all coffee, but **strong black coffee** is still a general idea)  
*but*: Did you like **the coffee we had with our meal last night**? (= particular coffee)

(**the flowers** = the flowers in your garden, not flowers in general)

- **Children** learn a lot from playing. (= children in general)