

## Definite and Indefinite Nouns

The subject covered in this lesson is to make you familiar with definite and indefinite nouns in Persian. This will make it easier to learn objects in the next lesson. However, if you found what follows confusing, there is no need to worry. The main aim is to gain the ability to understand Persian sentences correctly. Being able to produce grammatically perfect sentences, for now, is not a priority.

A noun is said to be indefinite when it does not refer to a specific object. For example, in the sentence "I read a book", the word "book" is indefinite because we don't know which book it is talking about. On the contrary, when we say "I read *the* book", the speaker and listener both know exactly which book is being referred to, and the word "book" is thus no longer indefinite. Whenever a noun is not referring to a specific object that we are already familiar with, we are dealing with an indefinite noun.

We bought a book for him/her.	برایش یک کتاب خریدیم.
Hossein has some pens.	حسین چند خودکار دارد.
Ehsan has two brothers.	احسان دو برادر دارد.
A big stone was behind the wall.	سنگ بزرگی پشت دیوار بود.

As you see in the last example above, one way for making a noun indefinite is attaching the suffix "ی" (usually meaning "one" and pronounced similar to the English "ee" as in the word "free") to it. The suffix can be attached either to the main noun or to its adjectives.

I read a short book about the French revolution.	یک کتاب کوتاه درباره‌ی انقلاب فرانسه خواندم.
I read a short book about the French revolution.	کتابی کوتاه درباره‌ی انقلاب فرانسه خواندم.
I read a short book about the French revolution.	کتاب کوتاهی درباره‌ی انقلاب فرانسه خواندم.

Among the three ways the above sentence can be expressed, the second form is used less often in today's Persian. This suffix "ی", along with the words "یک" and "چند" and numbers are often said to be the Persian indefinite articles. There are no definite articles in written Persian: definite nouns are marked simply by not being indefinite.

The woman was at (*lit.* behind) the door. زن پشت در بود.

A woman was at (*lit.* behind) the door. زنی پشت در بود.

Remember that the suffix "ی" does not always mean "one". It can be translated into "one", "any", "some", or even nothing, depending on the context.

She had a long neck. گردن بلندی داشت.

She had long legs. پاهای بلندی داشت.

In the second example above, the suffix "ی" is working only as an indefinite article and does not have a separate meaning such as "some", "one", etc.

### The special case of "که" preceding "ی"

However, there is one special case in which the suffix "ی" is no longer an indefinite article. It is in the presence of the word "که" meaning "that".

The email you sent was empty. ایمیلی که فرستادی خالی بود.

The food we ate was poisoned. غذایی که خوردیم مسموم بود.

The man you see here is a liar! مردی که در اینجا می‌بینید یک دروغ‌گوست!

Any noun that is going to be explained about by a phrase starting with "که" is always (not strictly, but let's consider so for now) ended with a "ی" suffix. Notice that here, the noun is not indefinite or "one of many", it is rather the particular thing we are talking about, is definite, and is translated into English with the article "the".