Les articles partitifs
(Partitive articles)

Let’s take a look at articles. You already know the definite article, which indicates a specific item or a category of items in general.

*le repas* (the meal)

*J’adore le chocolat* (I love chocolate [in general])

You also already know the indefinite article, which indicates an item, but doesn’t specify which one.

*un fromage* (a cheese)

*une boisson* (a drink)

The partitive article indicates an unspecified amount of something.

*du fromage* (some cheese)

*de l’eau* (some water)

Most of the time, the partitive article in French corresponds to the word “some” in English. Partitive articles are used when referring to a part of, a portion of, or any unspecified amount of something. On the other hand, if the specific amount is known or countable, the indefinite article must be used instead.

Le professeur a bu *de l’eau* avant de parler.
(The professor drank some water before speaking).

Le professeur a mangé *un* sandwich avant de parler.
(The professor ate a sandwich before speaking).

Here, you are saying that the professor drank some water. You’re not talking about all the water or a specific amount of water, you are just saying that he drank water. The partitive article is always used in French to express an unspecified amount of something, even in cases when you wouldn’t include the word “some” in English. For example, in English it would also be correct to say “The professor drank water before speaking”, but in French, the partitive article is always required.

Partitive articles are also used to talk about things that are not usually counted and things that have an unknown quantity. These are often situations where we wouldn’t use the word “some” in English.

*Ils ont du courage*. (They have courage.)

Courage isn’t something that you can count. For instance, in English, you wouldn’t say “They have a courage” or “They have two courages.” “They have the courage” doesn’t make sense either. The same is true in French.
The partitive article will agree in gender and number with the noun. This chart will help:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular masculine noun</th>
<th>du</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singular feminine noun</td>
<td>de la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singular noun beginning with a vowel or mute “h”</td>
<td>de l’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural noun</td>
<td>des</td>
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</tbody>
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Voulez-vous du porc ou du poulet? (Would you like some pork or some chicken?)
Je vais prendre de la soupe, s’il vous plaît. (I'll have some soup, please.)
Elle veut de la limonade ou de l’eau. (She wants some lemon soda or some water.)
Ils passent des vacances à Paris. (They're spending some vacation time in Paris.)

To use the partitive article with a negative expression, we will apply the same rule that is used for indefinite articles. The article will become de after negative expressions.

Ils ont du lait mais ils n’ont pas de beurre.

You will not use the partitive for most expressions of quantity. If you’re describing the quantity, even with general terms like beaucoup, the article following it will become de.

Les voisins ont beaucoup de pain. (The neighbors have a lot of bread.)
Elle a bu une tasse de café. (She drank a cup of coffee.)

Unlike English, in French it is normal to use expressions of quantity such as beaucoup de in front of plural nouns. However, the de will never become des.

Elle a mangé beaucoup de fruits hier. (She ate a lot of fruit yesterday.)

Partitive articles are never used with verbs of preference. These verbs will use a definite article like le, la, or les. Some of these verbs are:

aimer       adorer       préférer       détester       haïr

J’aime le chocolat. (I like chocolate.)

Using articles properly is a very important part of your ability to communicate correctly and clearly, so make sure you study them and understand their differences.