

ARTICLES

It is often difficult to decide whether an English noun needs an article before it, and, if so, which article to use. The English language uses articles to identify nouns, they act much like adjectives and clarify whether a noun is specific or general, singular or plural.

Hence, the main things to consider when choosing an article are whether or not the noun is countable, and whether it is definite. Countability means that the noun can be made plural, ex: book/books.

General rules:

- Place the article before the noun.
- Place the article before the adjective when the noun is modified by an adjective.
Examples: the purple house, the black cat, a white dog, an open book...
- Do not add an article when the noun has a possessive pronoun (my, his, her, our, their) or a demonstrative pronoun (this, that). **Examples:** my house, her book, that house, this book...

There are two types of articles:

1. Indefinite Articles (a/an)

If the noun is singular and countable, and this is the first time you have mentioned it, then you will usually need the indefinite article:

- I bought a book – we do not know which book.
- There is a bird outside – we do not know anything about the bird.

➤ Rules:

- Do not use **a** or **an** with a plural noun.
- Use **a** when the word following it starts with a consonant sound.
- Use **an** as an unspecific reference before a vowel sound (**a, e, i, o, u**).
- Words that begin with **u** or **h** can have either a vowel or a consonant sound. Make the choice based on the sound of the first word after the article, even if that word is not the noun. **Examples:**
 - **a** union, **a** uniform (use **a** when the **u** sounds like the **y** in you)

- **an** unbelievable event, **an** umbrella
- **an** honor, an hour, **an** honest person
- **a** hotel, **a** history book, **a** historian

2. Definite Article (the):

While **a** and **an** are used for nouns that are general, **the** is used for nouns that are known by you and the person you are speaking to.

➤ Rules:

- Use “**the**” as a specific reference to a common noun or something that is one of a kind.
 - Give me **the book** on the table. (identifies a specific book)
 - **The sun** rose at seven o'clock. (identifies something that is one of a kind)
- Use **a** or **an** to introduce a noun the first time it is mentioned, and then **the** is used afterwards whenever the noun is mentioned.
 - I bought a sandwich for lunch. I shared **the** sandwich with my friend.
- Use **the** when a noun is preceded by a superlative adjective: the best, the tallest, the most beautiful.

3. No article:

We do not need an article if a noun is plural or uncountable and it is not definite. Ex: Women generally live longer than men.

Activity: Complete with a, an, the, or no article:

- I could really use sandwich right now.
- I always add sugar and milk.
- If I add sugar and milk, then I have best cup of coffee I could ask for.
- I have pencil in my hand, and pencil is blue.
- I go to school in San José. school is San José State University.
- I am taking exam right now. exam is quizzing me on articles.
- There are three articles in English. articles are a, an, and the.