

An article is a particular kind of adjective that describes and precedes a noun.

There are two types of articles:

1. Indefinite (*a* and *an*)- used with **singular** nouns that are **general** in nature.

Examples:

An iguana is a reptile.

A cow grazed along a green pasture.

There is an orange tree in the backyard.

- ➞ Use *a* when the noun begins with a consonant or consonant sound: a cup, a unit
- ➞ Use *an* when the noun begins with a vowel or vowel sound: an apple, an herb
- ➞ The same rules apply when an adjective precedes a noun: a good book, or an excellent essay

2. Definite (*the*)- used with **singular or plural** nouns that are **specific** in nature.

Examples:

The group will meet in the library.

The ball got lost in the bushes.

The grass is green thanks to the rain.

	Indefinite	Definite
Singular	a pencil (any pencil; consonant sound) an eraser (any eraser; vowel sound)	the pencil (specific pencil) the eraser (specific eraser)
Plural	some pencils (any pencils) some erasers (any erasers)	the pencils (specific pencils) the erasers (specific erasers)

Some other rules for using *the* include:

- ➞ Use *the* before:
 - the names of rivers, oceans, and seas (the Atlantic, the Pacific)
 - the points on the globe (the South Pole, the Equator)
 - the names of geographical areas (the East, the North)
 - the names of forests, deserts, gulfs, and peninsulas (the Congo rainforest, the Mojave desert, the gulf of Mexico, the San Francisco peninsula)



➔ Do not use *the* before:

- names of countries (Spain, Nigeria, China) **except** when referring to the United States, the United Kingdom, the United Emirates, and the Netherlands
- names of cities, towns, or states (Rome, Sydney, New York)
- names of streets (Main St.)
- names of lakes and bays (Lake Victoria) **except** with groups of lakes (the Great Lakes)
- names of mountains (Mount Fuji) **except** with mountain ranges (the Alps)
- names of continents (Africa, Australia)
- names of islands (Saint Thomas) **except** with chains of islands (the Hawaiian Islands)

Using articles also depends on certain qualities of the noun it is used with. There are three qualities to consider:

1. Countable vs. Non-countable

A. If the noun can be counted and is in the singular form, then use *a* or *an*.

Examples:

A cup of tea would be nice.

The hen laid an egg.

B. If the noun can be counted and is in the plural form, then use *the*.

Examples:

The cups are all white.

All the eggs are broken.

C. If the noun cannot be counted, use *the*:

Examples:

The water in the kettle is hot.

The grass turned green after the rain.



2. General v. Specific – articles can be used when referring to the group that a countable noun refers to.

Examples:

A rose is a type of flower. (A single rose)

The rose is a type of flower. (All roses in general)

- A. Omission of articles- refer to a noun without using an article to express the noun in a general sense (e.g., Roses are a type of flower.).
 - B. Zero article- some nouns simply do not use articles, such as **(1)** the names of languages and nationalities (e.g., Chilean, Ethiopian), **(2)** the names of sports (e.g., soccer, basketball), and **(3)** the names of academic subjects (e.g., chemistry, engineering).
3. First v. Subsequent mention- when introducing a noun for the first time, use *a* or *an*; when referring to the same noun later, use *the*.

Example:

A concert was held at the stadium last week...I enjoyed the concert.

Practice

Fill in the spaces with the correct article(s). These sentences will help reinforce the rules for using articles. Write an example for each rule.

1. _____ are used when referring to singular nouns that are general in nature.
2. When a noun starts with a consonant, use _____.
3. When a noun starts with a vowel or vowel sound, use _____.
4. _____ is used when referring to specific nouns that can be either singular or plural.
5. _____ is used when referring to rivers, oceans, and seas; however, _____ is used for lakes, bays, and islands.



6. _____ is used for continents and countries; however, _____ is used for geographical areas and points on the globe.
7. When referring to forests, deserts, gulfs, and peninsulas use _____.
8. When referring to states, towns, cities, and streets use _____.
9. When a noun is countable, _____ is used, but when it is not, use _____.
10. _____ is used to refer to a single member of a group, but _____ is used to refer to group membership.
11. When referring to a noun in general, use _____ or omit the article entirely.
12. The first time a noun is mentioned, use _____ and then _____ each time it is referred to later.

Find out more. Search the web or a grammar book for **indefinite articles, definite articles, countable nouns, non-countable nouns, general nouns, and specific nouns.**