

Articles

What are they?

The English language has definite (“*the*”) and indefinite articles (“*a*” and “*an*”). The use depends on whether you are referring to a specific member of a group (definite) or to any member of a group (indefinite).

<u>Indefinite Articles: “a” and “an”</u>	<u>Definite Article: “the”</u>
<p>You will use an indefinite article when referring to any member of a group or one your readers are not yet familiar with.</p>	<p>You will use the definite article when referring to a specific member of a group.</p>
<p>The indefinite article “<i>a</i>” is used when the word following it (which may be a noun or an adjective) begins with a consonant or with a consonant sound.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ a dog○ a computer○ a onetime sale <p>The indefinite article “<i>an</i>” is used when the word following it begins with a vowel (<i>a</i>, <i>e</i>, <i>i</i>, <i>o</i>, or <i>u</i>).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ an apple○ an ellipsis○ an umbrella	<p>The consonant and vowel rules that apply to “<i>a</i>” and “<i>an</i>” do not apply to the use of “<i>the</i>.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ the neighbor’s dog○ the nice nephew○ the mooing cows○ the building○ the red hairdryer○ the airplane
<p>If you were to say, “Juan set his keys on <i>a</i> table,” it would tell the reader that Juan chose any table, an unspecific table, one of many.</p> <p>If you were to say, “Marcus goes swimming in <i>a</i> lake on Fridays,” the reader understands that <i>which</i> lake Marcus chose really isn’t important, and might even change from week to week.</p>	<p>If you were to say, “Juan set his keys on <i>the</i> table,” it would tell the reader that Juan chose a specific table, one you may have already mentioned.</p> <p>If you were to say, “Marcus goes swimming in <i>the</i> lake on Fridays,” the reader understands that it is a specific lake, and that he goes to the same place each week.</p>

Plural Indefinite Article - *some*

You will use the word “some” before a plural noun (or its modifying adjective):

- some hairs
- some boxes

The singular: I put all of my clothes in a box I found in the basement.

The plural: I put all of my clothes in *some* boxes I found in the basement.

Plural Nouns

Plural nouns do not require an indefinite article: “I love apples,” instead of “I love an apples.” (You must use the definite article if you have already introduced the idea or are referring to a specific member of a group: “I love *the* apples grown across the street.”)

Non-count Nouns

Non-count nouns, which include concepts and ideas that cannot be counted in number, may or may not require an article: no one hard and fast rule applies. You can write “Kindness spreads like wildfire,” instead of “A kindness spreads like wildfire,” or “The kindness spreads like wildfire” (unless you are referring to a specific kindness mentioned elsewhere in your writing, as in “the kindness you showed me”).

Proper Nouns

Proper nouns, which name a particular person, place or thing, sometimes take the article “*the*” and sometimes do not.

- Soda is damaging to your teeth, but everyone still drinks it.
- *The* soda in my cup is flat, so I think I will throw it out.
- We are going to meet at *the* White House.

Do not use “*the*” before:

- names of countries (except *the* Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates, and *the* United States)
- names of cities, towns or states
- names of streets
- names of lakes and bays (except a group of lakes—*the* Great lakes)
- names of mountains (except mountain ranges—*the* Rockies)
- names of continents
- names of islands (except island chains—*the* Canary islands)

Do use “*the*” before:

- names of rivers, oceans and seas
- points on the globe
- geographical areas
- deserts, forests, gulfs and peninsulas

Adapted from:

<http://www.owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/esl/eslart.html> 3/14/06 – 10:00AM & *The Brief Holt Handbook, Fourth Edition*, Kirsznner & Mandell, 2004

PRACTICE

Exercise 1 – Definite and Indefinite Articles

Fill in the blank for each sentence using either *a*, *an*, or *the*, or leave the space blank if none is needed.

Example:

I was going to the beach where my cousin Willie lost his board in the waves.

1. Last week _____ seagull dropped his fish onto my car.
2. Maria took out _____ garbage before reading.
3. _____ surfboard cut through the waves as she sped toward the beach.
4. Sculpture is _____ interesting art form, whether in metal, clay or uranium.
5. I love picnics—especially when I remember _____ food.
6. My house is falling apart, _____ shutters are in disrepair, and _____ windows are broken.
7. The brothers met to discuss _____ possible solution.
8. I went to the lab to work on _____ computer, but they were all taken.
9. Well, professor, _____ alien came and stole my gray matter before I could finish my homework.
10. This semester _____ same student violated his restraining order.
11. She passed him to avoid _____ confrontation involving _____ police.
12. I want to go to _____ part of Ukraine where they speak _____ Russian dialect.
13. The assistants found _____ theme that meant the most to them, and they wove it carefully into _____ handbook they could be proud of.
14. _____ airplane's tires skidded down _____ Los Angeles Airport's main runway before knocking out _____ baggage cart and _____ fuel truck.
15. I am studying _____ American history in school, but only after I pass my Biology class and ace _____ final exam.