WHAT IS AN ARTICLE?

- An article has the same basic function as an adjective in that it is used to describe a noun. There are two different articles in the English language: the and a/an. The is used to describe a specific noun, whereas a/an is used to describe a more general noun. For this reason, the is also referred to as a definite article, and a/an is referred to as an indefinite article.

1. DEFINITE ARTICLES: THE

“The” is used before singular and plural nouns when the noun is specific.

The dog is black and tan.
I want to go the concert on Saturday night.
Have you seen the pigeon nest outside my window?

The names of geographical places are specific nouns, and many require definite articles. Use “the” before the following specific nouns:

- Names of oceans, rivers, and seas
  - the Potomac River, the Indian Ocean, the Dead Sea

- Geographical areas
  - the Southern U.S, the Northern Hemisphere, the North Pole

- Deserts, forests, gulfs, and peninsulas
  - the Sahara Desert, the Amazon Rain Forest
  - the Gulf of Mexico, the Arabian Peninsula

- Groups of lakes, mountain ranges, and chains of islands
  - the Hawaiian Islands, the Appalachian Mountains
  - the Great Lakes
However, no article is necessary before some specific nouns.

- **Singular names of countries or territories**
  - Canada, Puerto Rico, Mexico

- **Names of cities, towns, or states**
  - Baltimore, Alexandria, New York City, California,

Additionally, no article is needed before the following specific nouns:

- **Names of streets**
  - Main Street, Fifth Avenue, Park Place

- **Names of lakes and bays**
  - Lake Erie, Chesapeake Bay

- **Names of mountains**
  - Mount St. Helens, Mount Kilimanjaro

- **Names of continents**
  - North America, Asia, Europe

- **Names of islands**
  - Jamaica, Easter Island, Aruba

- **Names of languages**
  - English, Russian, Mandarin

- **Names of sports**
  - soccer, baseball, rugby

- **Names of academic subjects**
  - finance, accounting, business

### 2. INDEFINITE ARTICLES: A/AN

“A” and “an” are indefinite articles that identify nouns that are not specific. When used, “a” and “an” can refer to any member of a group.
Winnie wanted to apply to a job before graduating next semester. (The use of “a” implies that Winnie wants to apply to any job, not one specific job)

Winnie wanted to apply to the job at the software company on Main Street before graduating next semester. (The use of “the” means that Winnie wants to apply to one specific job at one specific business, not just any job with any business)

My boyfriend needs to buy a new car because his engine stopped working. (The use of “a” implies he wants to buy any car and has not decided yet on the car he is going to purchase)

My boyfriend is going to buy the red Toyota Corolla he looked at yesterday. (The use of “the” means he has chosen the specific car out of all the other cars that he is going to purchase)

Remember: “A” and “an” depend on the sound that follow each. If the sound following the article is a vowel sound, use “an.” If the sound following the article is a consonant sound, use “a.” If you are unsure of the sound, speak the word out loud.

The “h” in hour is silent, therefore creating a vowel sound when hour is pronounced.

- an hour, a hairnet
  The “h” in hairnet is spoken as a consonant sound.

- an honor, a horror movie

- an umbrella, an ugly duckling, a university, a uniform