



# ARTICLES

## 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 ARTICLE: THE

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

**The** dog is black and tan.

I want to go to **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, & 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



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## 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, marketing

## 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)



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**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 hairnet is spoken as a consonant sound.

1. **an** hour, **a** hairnet

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

2. **an** honor, **a** horror movie

3. **an** umbrella, **an** ugly duckling, **a** university, **a** uniform

