



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 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 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

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

ARTICLES

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 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