In English, nouns are indicated by articles. Articles are essentially adjectives, because they modify or describe the nouns they precede. There are two articles in English: THE and A/AN. Their distinctions and uses are outlined in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition/Usage for ‘The’</th>
<th>Definition/Usage for ‘A/An’</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ‘The’ is referred to as the definite article. We use it to modify or refer to specific nouns. | ‘A/An’ is referred to as the indefinite article. We use it to refer to modify or refer to non-specific nouns. | 1. Let’s review **the** proposal: This sentence implies that we are referring to a specific proposal, one that the listener(s)/reader(s) are familiar with.  
2. Let’s review **a** proposal: This sentence implies that we are referring to any proposal. |
| ‘The’ is also used to refer to a specific member of a group | ‘A/An’ is also used to refer to a non-specific member of a group. | 1. We’ve just attended **the** most interesting lecture in our faculty: This sentence implies that there are many lectures in our faculty, but one particular lecture is the most interesting.  
2. We’ve just attended **an** interesting lecture at our faculty: This sentence implies that there are many interesting lectures in our faculty, and we attended one of them. |
| Using ‘A’ or ‘An’ depends on the **sound** of the word either article immediately precedes. | 1. ‘A’ + singular noun that begins with a consonant: **a** book, **a** plan, **a** thesis, **a** ruler  
2. ‘An’ + singular noun that begins with a vowel: **an** inference, **an** angle, **an** agenda, **an** ellipse  
3. ‘A’ + singular noun beginning with a consonant sound: **a** university (sounds like ‘yoo-iversity’: it sounds like it begins with a consonant ‘y’ sound), **a** user, **a** unicorn  
4. ‘An’ + ‘h’ when it is pronounced in words like ‘historical’: **an** historical moment in time  
5. ‘An’ + acronym that begins with a vowel sound: **An** ELD workshop was held this evening at the Writing Centre.  
6. ‘An’ + acronym that begins with a consonant letter, but has a vowel sound: Philip has won **an** MVP award for his strong effort on the UTSC basketball team.  
7. ‘A’ or ‘AN’, depending on the initial sound of an adjective that modifies a noun: a broken electric fan; a unique design; an unusual situation; a frustrating experience |
The definite article is used when referring to specific or particular nouns. ‘The’ indicates that the noun refers to a specific category or member of a group: it is definite.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘The’ can be used with non-count nouns, or it can be omitted altogether</th>
<th>‘A/An’ can only be used count nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Susan loves to ski on the newly-fallen snow: She is skiing on a specific snowy area 2. Susan loves to ski on newly-fallen snow. (‘snow’ is a non-count noun). 3. David would like to buy a new car. 4. David needs a job after losing his old one. (‘car’ and ‘job’ are count nouns)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘The’ is used with specific geographical terms

Do not use ‘the’ before:

Omission of Articles

There are some common nouns that do not take an article. These include:
1. names of languages and nationalities: Japanese, Indian, Canadian, English, Swahili 2. names of sports: volleyball, hockey, basketball, tennis, soccer 3. names of academic subjects: mathematics, biology, history, sciences, literature

Definitions/Information on articles adapted from ‘The Owl at Purdue’ website: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/printable/540/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/printable/540/) Examples adapted from the ACE Workshops, Engineering Communication Program, University of Toronto.