

# ARTICLES

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.

Definition/Usage for 'The'	Definition/Usage for 'A/An'	Examples
'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.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Let's review <b>the</b> proposal: This sentence implies that we are referring to a specific proposal, one that the listener(s)/reader(s) are familiar with.</li> <li>Let's review <b>a</b> proposal: This sentence implies that we are referring to any proposal.</li> </ol>
'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.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We've just attended <b>the</b> 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.</li> <li>We've just attended <b>an</b> interesting lecture at our faculty: This sentence implies that there are many interesting lectures in our faculty, and we attended one of them.</li> </ol>
	Using 'A' or 'An' depends on the <b>sound</b> of the word either article immediately precedes.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'<b>A</b>' + singular noun that begins with a consonant: <b>a</b> book, <b>a</b> plan, <b>a</b> thesis, <b>a</b> ruler</li> <li>'<b>An</b>' + singular noun that begins with a vowel: <b>an</b> inference, <b>an</b> angle, <b>an</b> agenda, <b>an</b> elipse</li> <li>'<b>A</b>' + singular noun beginning with a consonant sound: <b>a</b> university (sounds like 'yoo- niversity': it sounds like it begins with a consonant 'y' sound), <b>a</b> user, <b>a</b> unicorn</li> <li>'<b>An</b>' + 'h' when it is pronounced in words like 'historical': <b>an</b> historical moment in time</li> <li>'<b>An</b>' + acronym that begins with a vowel sound: <b>An</b> ELD workshop was held this evening at the Writing Centre.</li> <li>'<b>An</b>' + acronym that begins with a consonant letter, but has a vowel sound: Philip has won <b>an</b> MVP award for his strong effort on the UTSC basketball team.</li> <li>'<b>A</b>' or '<b>AN</b>', 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</li> </ol>

<p>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.</p>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>The</b> professor who taught me in first year is also teaching me this year: This sentence implies that 'professor' is someone specific – namely someone I already know and who holds a specific meaning in my life</li> <li>2. David handed me <b>the</b> map of <b>the</b> small town we were in: In this sentence, 'the map' implies that there is only one map that was created for this town. 'The town' implies the specific town that David and I are in at the moment.</li> </ol>
<p>'The' can be used with non-count nouns, or it can be omitted altogether</p>	<p>'A/An' can only be used count nouns</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Susan loves to ski on <b>the</b> newly-fallen snow: She is skiing on a specific snowy area</li> <li>2. Susan loves to ski on newly-fallen snow. ('snow' is a non-count noun).</li> <li>3. David would like to buy a new car.</li> <li>4. David needs a job after losing his old one. ('car' and 'job' are count nouns)</li> </ol>
<p>'The' is used with specific geographical terms</p>		<p><b>Do not</b> use 'the' before:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. names of most countries/territories: Canada, France, Greece, China, India, Iran, Taiwan (except, '<b>the</b> Netherlands', '<b>the</b> Dominican Republic', '<b>the</b> Philippines', '<b>the</b> United States')</li> <li>2. names of cities, towns, or states: Tokyo, Miami, Karachi, Ontario, Kansas</li> <li>3. names of lakes and bays: Lake Ontario, Lake Michigan, Penobscot Bay (except a group of lakes: <b>the</b> Great Lakes)</li> <li>4. names of mountains: Mount Everest, Mount McKinley (except with ranges of mountains: <b>the</b> Andes, <b>the</b> Rockies; or <b>with</b> unusual names: <b>the</b> Matterhorn)</li> <li>5. names of continents: Europe, Asia</li> <li>6. names of islands: Easter Island, Prince Edward Island (except with island chains: <b>the</b> Aleutians, <b>the</b> Hebrides, <b>the</b> Canary Islands)</li> </ol> <p><b>Do use</b> 'the' before:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. names of rivers, oceans, and seas: <b>the</b> Nile, <b>the</b> Atlantic, <b>the</b> Mediterranean, <b>the</b> Three Gorges, <b>The</b> Yellow, <b>the</b> St. Lawrence</li> <li>9. specific points on the earth: <b>The</b> Equator, <b>The</b> North Pole, <b>The</b> South Pole</li> <li>10. Geographical areas: <b>The</b> Far East, <b>The</b> West, <b>The</b> Middle East</li> <li>11. Deserts, forests, gulfs, and peninsulas: <b>the</b> Sahara, <b>the</b> Gulf of Mexico, <b>The</b> Black Forest, <b>The</b> Iberian Peninsula</li> </ol>
<p><b>Omission of Articles</b></p>		<p>There are some common nouns that <b>do not</b> take an article. These include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. names of languages and nationalities: Japanese, Indian, Canadian, English, Swahili</li> <li>2. names of sports: volleyball, hockey, basketball, tennis, soccer</li> <li>3. names of academic subjects: mathematics, biology, history, sciences, literature</li> </ol>

Definitions/Information on articles adapted from 'The Owl at Purdue' website: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/printable/540/> Examples adapted from the ACE Workshops, Engineering Communication Program, University of Toronto.