

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"> 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. 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.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 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.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 'A' + singular noun that begins with a consonant: a book, a plan, a thesis, a ruler 'An' + singular noun that begins with a vowel: an inference, an angle, an agenda, an elipse 'A' + singular noun beginning with a consonant sound: a university (sounds like 'yoo- niversity': it sounds like it begins with a consonant 'y' sound), a user, a unicorn 'An' + 'h' when it is pronounced in words like 'historical': an historical moment in time 'An' + acronym that begins with a vowel sound: An ELD workshop was held this evening at the Writing Centre. '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. '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

<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"> 1. The 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 2. David handed me the map of the 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.
<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"> 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)
<p>'The' is used with specific geographical terms</p>		<p>Do not use 'the' before:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. names of most countries/territories: Canada, France, Greece, China, India, Iran, Taiwan (except, 'the Netherlands', 'the Dominican Republic', 'the Philippines', 'the United States') 2. names of cities, towns, or states: Tokyo, Miami, Karachi, Ontario, Kansas 3. names of lakes and bays: Lake Ontario, Lake Michigan, Penobscot Bay (except a group of lakes: the Great Lakes) 4. names of mountains: Mount Everest, Mount McKinley (except with ranges of mountains: the Andes, the Rockies; or with unusual names: the Matterhorn) 5. names of continents: Europe, Asia 6. names of islands: Easter Island, Prince Edward Island (except with island chains: the Aleutians, the Hebrides, the Canary Islands) <p>Do use 'the' before:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. names of rivers, oceans, and seas: the Nile, the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, the Three Gorges, The Yellow, the St. Lawrence 9. specific points on the earth: The Equator, The North Pole, The South Pole 10. Geographical areas: The Far East, The West, The Middle East 11. Deserts, forests, gulfs, and peninsulas: the Sahara, the Gulf of Mexico, The Black Forest, The Iberian Peninsula
<p>Omission of Articles</p>		<p>There are some common nouns that do not take an article. These include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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/> Examples adapted from the ACE Workshops, Engineering Communication Program, University of Toronto.