

## Understanding Articles

Articles are a kind of adjective used before different types of nouns; they answer the question “Which one?” There are two types of articles: *definite* and *indefinite*.

### Definite Articles

*The* is called a definite article. It is used with singular or plural specific nouns, both count and non-count. The word *the* is used with a noun that has been identified or named earlier.

*The men are climbing the mountain.*  
*Bring me the hot water.*

The definite article can also be used when referring to something that is unique in nature.

*The sun warms the earth.*  
*The Great Plains are east of the Rocky Mountains.*

The definite article can also be used when referring to the following:

- Names that include the word *of*: *the United States of America, the Republic of China*
- Plural names: *the Philippines, the Alps*
- Abstract nouns: *The judge found **the injustice** to be intolerable.*

*The* can be used with both count and non-count nouns:

<i>the chairs</i>	<i>the furniture</i>
<i>the classes</i>	<i>the homework</i>

### Indefinite Articles

*A* and *an* are the indefinite articles. They are used with unspecified singular count nouns. However, they are not used with plural nouns, nor are they normally used with non-count nouns, such as *advice* or *information*.

The word *a* is used before a single count noun that begins with a **consonant sound**.

<i>a university</i>	<i>a car</i>	<i>a circus</i>
<i>a union</i>	<i>a building</i>	<i>a megaphone</i>

The word *an* is used before a single count noun that begins with a **vowel sound**:

<i>an hourglass</i>	<i>an apple</i>	<i>an eagle</i>
<i>an honor</i>	<i>an umbrella</i>	<i>an area</i>

### No Article

We do not usually use articles with abstract nouns referred to in a general sense (*love, fear*) or with the following:

names of languages (English)	names of academic subjects (math)	names of continents (Africa)
names of sports (soccer)	names of cities and states (Utah)	names of islands (Pohnpei)
names of seasons (spring)	names of diseases (cancer)	names of meals (dinner)

Article rules are often broken or applied inconsistently. For more information on article use, consult an English language or online ESL guide such as [grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar](http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar) and search for *articles* or *determiners*.

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