# Articles

## Explanation

The English language has definite ("the") and indefinite articles ("a" and "an"). The use depends on whether you are referring to any member of a group, or to a specific member of a group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indefinite Articles: “a” and “an”</th>
<th>Definite Article: “the”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You will use an indefinite article when referring to any member of a group or one your readers are not yet familiar with.</td>
<td>You will use the definite article when referring to a specific member of a group.</td>
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| The indefinite article “a” is used when the word following it (which may be a noun or an adjective) begins with a consonant or with a consonant sound.  
  o a dog  
  o a computer  
  o a onetime sale | The consonant and vowel rules that apply to “a” and “an” do not apply to the use of “the.”  
  o the neighbor’s dog  
  o the nice nephew  
  o the mooing cows  
  o the building  
  o the red hairdryer  
  o the airplane |
| The indefinite article “an” is used when the word following it begins with a vowel (a, e, i, o, or u).  
  o an apple  
  o an ellipsis  
  o an umbrella | |
| If you were to say, “Juan set his keys on a table,” it would tell the reader that Juan chose any table, an unspecific table, one of many. | If you were to say, “Juan set his keys on the table,” it would tell the reader that Juan chose a specific table, one you may have already mentioned. |
| If you were to say, “Marcus goes swimming in a lake on Fridays,” the reader understands that which lake Marcus chose really isn’t important, and might even change from week to week. | If you were to say, “Marcus goes swimming in the lake on Fridays,” the reader understands that it is a specific lake, and that he goes to the same place each week. |
Plural Indefinite Article - *some*
You will use the word “*some*” before a plural noun (or its modifying adjective):

- some hairs
- some boxes

The singular: I put all of my clothes in a box I found in the basement.
The plural: I put all of my clothes in *some* boxes I found in the basement.

**Plural Nouns**
Plural nouns do not require an indefinite article: “I love apples,” instead of “I love an apples.” (You must use the definite article if you have already introduced the idea or are referring to a specific member of a group: “I love *the* apples grown across the street.”)

**Non-count Nouns**
Non-count nouns, which include concepts and ideas that cannot be counted in number, may or may not require an article: no one hard and fast rule applies. You can write “Kindness spreads like wildfire,” instead of “A kindness spreads like wildfire,” or “The kindness spreads like wildfire” (unless you are referring to a specific kindness mentioned elsewhere in your writing, as in “the kindness you showed me”).

**Proper Nouns**
Proper nouns, which name a particular person, place or thing, sometimes take the article “*the*” and sometimes do not.

- Soda is damaging to your teeth, but everyone still drinks it.
- *The* soda in my cup is flat, so I think I will throw it out.
- We are going to meet at *the* White House.

**Do not** use “*the*” before:

- names of countries (except *the* Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates, and *the* United States)
- names of cities, towns or states
- names of streets
- names of lakes and bays (except a group of lakes—*the* Great lakes)
- names of mountains (except mountain ranges—*the* Rockies)
- names of continents
- names of islands (except island chains—*the* Canary islands)

**Do use “*the*” before:

- names of rivers, oceans and seas
- points on the globe
- geographical areas
- deserts, forests, gulfs and peninsulas

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Exercise 1 – Definite and Indefinite Articles
Fill in the blank for each sentence using either a, an, or the, or leave the space blank if none is needed.

Example:
I was going to ___the___ beach where my cousin Willie lost his board in the waves.

1. Last week ______ seagull dropped his fish onto my car.

2. Maria took out ______ garbage before reading.

3. ______ surfboard cut through the waves as she sped toward the beach.

4. Sculpture is ______ interesting art form, whether in metal, clay or uranium.

5. I love picnics—especially when I remember ______ food.

6. My house is falling apart, ______ shutters are in disrepair, and ______ windows are broken.

7. The brothers meet to discuss ______ possible solution.

8. I went to the lab to work on ______ computer, but they were all taken.

9. Well, professor, ______ alien came and stole my gray matter before I could finish my homework.

10. This semester ______ same student violated his restraining order.

11. She passed him to avoid ______ confrontation involving ______ police.

12. I want to go to ______ part of Ukraine where they speak ______ Russian dialect.

13. The assistants found ______ theme that meant the most to them, and they wove it carefully into ______ handbook they could be proud of.

14. ______ airplane’s tires skidded down ______ Los Angeles Airport’s main runway before knocking out ______ baggage cart and ______ fuel truck.

15. I am studying _______ American history in school, but only after I pass my Biology class and ace _______ final exam.