

Articles: A, An, The

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The definite article **the** and the indefinite articles **a** and **an** signal that a noun follows. The noun may follow immediately after the article or after the modifiers between them.

the candidate

a sunset

an apple

the qualified candidate

a spectacular sunset

an enormous apple

1. **A** or **an** usually means one, but can also mean any one. Use **a** or **an** to precede a singular count noun whose specific identity is unknown. *(Remember, count nouns refer to persons, places, or things that can be counted: one girl, two apples, three pencils. Noncount nouns refer to things or ideas that cannot be counted: water, patience, furniture, air, love.)*
 - a. Use the article a before all consonant sounds, including long u, sounded h, and o when it has the sound of w.
 - a uniform
 - a day
 - a grade
 - a house
 - a book
 - a one-week delay
 - b. Use the article an before all vowel sounds (not necessarily vowel letters) except long u and before words beginning with silent h.
 - an essay
 - an x-ray
 - an hour

- an eyesore
- an ice-cream cone
- an 8-hour day

2. Use the definite article **the** with most nouns whose identity is known. Usually, the identity will be clear for one of the following reasons:

- a. The noun has been previously mentioned.
 - She brought plenty of money. I saw the money in her hand.
- b. A phrase or clause following the noun limits its identity (makes it specific).
 - The girl I told you about is standing over there.
- c. A superlative (such as *best* or *most*) makes the noun's identity specific.
 - Susan was the best athlete at Riverdale High School.
- d. The noun describes a unique person, place, or thing.
 - The sun shines every day in Southern California.
- e. The context or situation makes the noun's identity clear.
 - When I stood up, I accidentally kicked the chair

*Remember, do not use **the** with plural or noncount nouns that mean "all" or "in general"; do not use **the** with most proper nouns.*

- Many people in other parts of the world prefer **the** rice to all other grains.
- **The** Bob Glover is working tonight at the restaurant.
- **The** Japan is my favorite place to visit.