

Articles

Articles always come before nouns. There are two types:

1. “The” is a definite article. It corresponds to nouns that name specific things.
2. “A/an” is an indefinite article. They refer to unspecific or general things.

Article	When do I use?	Examples	When not to use it?
The	<p>A specific person/place/thing.</p> <p>Can be used for both singular and plural nouns.</p> <p>When the noun has been previously mentioned, so the reader has enough info to identify the noun specifically</p> <p>Geography: Specific names of rivers, oceans, seas, forests, gulfs, deserts, peninsulas, global points (the North Pole), mountain ranges, island chains (but not specific islands), a group of lakes, countries that are a specific collection of states</p>	<p>Person: I need to speak to the manager.</p> <p>Place: I am going to the mall.</p> <p>Thing: The chairs in my living room are brown.</p> <p>A car sped past us. My sister noted that the car was red.</p> <p>The Nile River The Pacific Ocean The Boreal Forest The Gulf of Mexico The Sahara Desert The Arabian Peninsula The North Pole The Alps The Hawaiian Islands The Great Lakes The United States</p>	<p>DON'T USE “the” ... when the noun is not specific</p> <p>...when a noun is describing a general category</p> <p>... when the noun has not been previously mentioned or is new</p>
A/an	<p>The noun is singular and general</p> <p>“An” is used when the following word begins with a vowel. You also use it when the first consonant is unpronounced and followed by a vowel</p> <p>The noun is new and has not been previously mentioned</p>	<p>Can I borrow a pencil?</p> <p>I ate an apple.</p> <p>She is an honest woman.</p> <p>A car sped past us. My sister noted that the car was red.</p>	<p>DON'T USE “a/an” ... when the noun is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plural - Specific - Noncount <p>... when the noun represents a category of things</p> <p>... when the noun has been previously mentioned</p>

No article needed or zero article:

Sometimes, no article is needed. Here are some common reasons why this might be.

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Singular proper nouns2. A non-count noun that represents all of its type or a concept in general3. A count noun that represents a general category (note: the count noun must be plural)4. The name of a holiday5. A different noun marker is already in place, such as:<ol style="list-style-type: none">A. a possessive noun (Steve's)B. A possessive pronoun or adjective (my, your, his, her, its, our, their)C. Demonstrative pronoun/adjective: this, that, these, thoseD. Quantifiers: all, any, each, either, every, few, many, some, etc.E. Numbers: two, five, forty-six	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. I live on <u>University Avenue</u>.2. I like <u>apples</u>. OR <u>Seniors</u> eat for free on Saturday.3. <u>Apartments</u> are expensive in Los Angeles. 4. It is <u>Christmas</u>.5.<ol style="list-style-type: none">A. I bought Steve's car.B. I lost my keys. C. I like those shoes. D. I have enough money.E. I have one dog.
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Source:

Hacker, Diana and Nancy Sommers. *A Writer's Reference, 8th Edition*. Bedford St. Martin, 2015.