



ARTICLES: A, An, The

Articles are used with nouns to specify whether the noun is definite or indefinite. In English, the indefinite articles are “a” and “an”, and these indicate that the noun refers to any member of a group. The definite article is “the”, and this indicates that the noun refers to a specific member of a group.

There are rules for the use of “a” and “an”:

- Use “a” with a singular noun beginning with a consonant₁ or consonant sound₂
 - **a** boy₁; **a** user₂
- Use “an” with a singular noun beginning with a vowel
 - **an** elephant
- Use “some” with plural nouns
 - **some** girls
- Use “a” if there is an adjective immediately following the article and the adjective’s initial sound is a consonant
 - **a** broken egg
 - **a** European country (sounds like ‘yer-o-pi-an’, i.e. begins with consonant ‘y’ sound)
- Use “an” if there is an adjective immediately following the article and the adjective’s initial sound is a vowel
 - **an** unusual problem

There are also rules for the use of “the”:

- Use “the” before singular and plural nouns when the noun is specific or particular
 - **The** birds that nest in **the** apple tree in my yard wake me with singing each morning.
- Use “the” before non-countable nouns that are specific
 - I drank **the** water from the kitchen faucet. (water is non-countable)

Note: Do not use “the” before non-countable nouns that are not specific or particular

- **Coffee** contains caffeine that keeps me awake all morning.
- Use “the” before geographic names of: rivers, oceans, seas, points on the globe, geographical areas, deserts, forests, gulfs and peninsulas
 - the Nile river; the Pacific ocean, the Red Sea, the equator, the Middle East, the Sahara Desert, the Black Forest, the Persian Gulf, the Iberian Peninsula
- Use “the” before the names of certain countries, and when naming a *group* of lakes, a *range* of mountains, or a *chain* of islands
 - the Netherlands, the US, the Great Lakes, the Andes mountains, the Hawaiian islands

Note: Do not use “the” before the names of most countries, cities, states, streets, lakes, bays, mountains, continents, and islands

- *Italy, Miami, Florida, Martin Luther King Blvd., Lake Erie, Montego Bay, Mount Everest, Antarctica, Easter Island*
- Use “the” for subsequent mention of a noun introduced earlier in a piece of writing
 - **A** robin flew into my window this afternoon, but **the** robin could not find its way out.

Note: Some nouns never take either article: languages/nationalities, sports and academic subjects

- *Chinese, volleyball, mathematics*