

## Articles

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There are two types of articles in English: *the* and *a* or *an*. We use articles to modify nouns depending on whether the nouns are known or unknown, general or specific, and countable or uncountable.

### When to use *the*

- *The* is a definite article, which means that it refers to nouns that are specific and/or known to the reader or the people being written about.
- **Using *the* for specific nouns**
- For example, if my friend asked me if I brought a specific bag with me to the grocery store, I would say, "Yes, I brought the bag."
- **Using *the* for uncountable nouns**
- We also use *the* to talk about uncountable nouns.
- If, during our trip to the grocery store, my friend and I needed to buy sugar, we would say "We need to buy sugar" until we found a bag of sugar, because we would just be talking about sugar in general.
- One we found a bag of sugar and the bag of sugar became known to us, one of us would say, "Put the sugar in the shopping cart."

### When to use *a* or *an*

*A* and *an* are indefinite articles, which means that they refer to nouns that are nonspecific and/or not known to the reader or the people being written about.

For example, if my friend asked me if I brought any bag to the grocery store and it didn't matter which one, I would say, "Yes, I brought a bag."

### When to use *a* and when to use *an*

We use *an* for words that begin with vowels (*a, e, i, o, u*), and *a* for words that begin with consonants, which are the other 22 letters in the alphabet.

For example, if I suggested to my friend that we buy one apple, I would say, "Let's get an apple." The word *apple* begins with the letter *a*, which is a vowel; therefore, we use the article *an*.

My friend might respond by saying, "Let's also get a banana." The word *banana* begins with the letter *b*, which is a consonant; therefore we use the article *a*.

### **Do not use *a* or *an* for uncountable nouns**

If you were writing a sentence about sand in your swimsuit, for example, you know that no one, including yourself, is going to sit down and count the individual grains of sand in your swimsuit, which makes *sand* an uncountable noun. Therefore, you wouldn't usually say, "I found a sand in my swimsuit!"

- You could say, "I found some sand in my swimsuit."
- If you have extra-sensitive skin, you could also say, "I found a grain of sand in my swimsuit!"

### **Remember**

- *The* is used for a specific, singular noun that is known to the reader or the people being written about—when the writer and readers know which one, when there is only one, or when the noun is identified within the sentence:
  - *The milk truck arrives every morning at 6:00.*
  - The writer and readers are both familiar with the specific milk truck.
  - *Who is the mayor of Aspen?*
  - There is only one mayor of Aspen.
  - *There's the woman who works at the library.*
  - The sentence identifies her as the woman who works at the library.
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- *A* and *an* are used for a nonspecific or unknown noun—when the writer and readers either don't know or choose not to identify the noun.
  - *A noisy truck goes by here early every morning.*
  - It's just a truck, not any particular truck, and the writer is mentioning it for the first time.
  - *He said he was the mayor of a small town.*
  - The writer doesn't know or doesn't choose to identify the town.
  - *I met a woman at the library today.*
  - This is the first mention of this particular woman.

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