

Articles

Articles are words that introduce nouns. To choose the correct article, you must first determine whether the noun that it refers to is 1) countable or uncountable and 2) specific or non-specific.

Countable or uncountable

Countable nouns can refer to one thing (singular) or to two or more things (plural). Uncountable nouns are neither singular nor plural; they refer to things that cannot be numbered, such as abstract concepts, fields of study, games or sports, gases, liquids, materials, and particles or grains.

Certain nouns (like *meat*, *stone*, *style*, and *time*) can be countable or uncountable depending on the context.

She drank a **glass** of water. (Countable)

The window is made of **glass**. (Uncountable)

If the noun is **countable**, you must determine whether it is specific or non-specific. (See below.)

If the noun is **uncountable**, do not use an article.

There is a lot of **sand** on the floor.

Every winter, I give **clothing** to the poor.

Specific or non-specific

Specific nouns refer to a particular member of a category; they point to a precise person or thing that can be identified. Non-specific nouns refer to a category or to an undefined member of a category; they point to a broader group of persons or things.

If the noun is **specific**, use "the".

The doctor said that I should stay in bed. (As opposed to: My wife is **a doctor**.)

Stella took **the dogs** to the park. (As opposed to: I love **dogs**.)

If the noun is **non-specific and singular**, use "a" or "an".

A plan is essential for this task. (As opposed to: We followed **the plan** that I established.)

He walked in the rain without **an umbrella**. (As opposed to: She lost **the umbrella** that I lent to her.)

If the noun is **non-specific and plural**, do not use an article.

Mike and Mitch are **teachers**. (As opposed to: Mike is **a teacher**.)

Tigers are dangerous **animals**. (As opposed to: This child is acting like **an animal**.)

To know more, see *Checkmate*, the *Oxford Learner's Grammar*, *A Practical English Grammar*, or similar writing guides.

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