

DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLE

Rule #1 - Specific identity not known: Use the indefinite article *a* or *an* only with a singular count noun whose specific identity is not known to the reader. Use *a* before nouns that begin with a consonant sound, and use *an* before nouns that begin with a vowel sound.

- Use the article *a* or *an* to indicate any non-specified member of a group or category.

*I think **an** animal is in the garage*

*That man is **a** scoundrel.*

*We are looking for **an** apartment.*

- Use the article *a* or *an* to indicate one in number (as opposed to more than one).

*I own **a** cat and two dogs.*

- Use the article *a* before a consonant sound, and use *an* before a vowel sound.

***a** boy, **an** apple*

◇ Sometimes an adjective comes between the article and noun:

***an** unhappy boy, **a** red apple*

- The plural form of *a* or *an* is *some*. Use *some* to indicate an unspecified, limited amount (but more than one).

***an** apple, **some** apples*

Rule #2 - Specific identity known: Use the definite article *the* with any noun (whether singular or plural, count or noncount) when the specific identity of the noun is known to the reader, as in the following situations:

- Use the article *the* when a particular noun has already been mentioned previously.

*I ate **an** apple yesterday. **The** apple was juicy and delicious.*

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- Use the article *the* when an adjective, phrase, or clause describing the noun clarifies or restricts its identity.

The boy sitting next to me raised his hand.

*Thank you for **the** advice you gave me.*

- Use the article *the* when the noun refers to something or someone that is unique.

the theory of relativity

the 2003 federal budget

Rule #3 - All things or things in general: Use no article with plural count nouns or any noncount nouns used to mean all or in general.

Trees are beautiful in the fall. (All trees are beautiful in the fall.)

He was asking for advice. (He was asking for advice in general.)

I do not like coffee. (I do not like all coffee in general.)

Additional Information Regarding the Use of Articles

- When indicating an unspecified, limited amount of a **count** or **noncount** noun, use *some*.

My cousin was seeking some advice from a counselor (not advice in general or advice about everything, but a limited amount of advice).

I would love some coffee right now (not coffee in general, but a limited amount of coffee).

We might get rain tomorrow. Some rain would be good for the crops (a certain amount of rain, as opposed to rain in general).

There are some drops of water on the table (a limited number, but more than one drop).

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- **Noncount nouns** are those which usually cannot be counted. Following are some common examples:

◇ **Certain food and drink items:** bacon, beef, bread, broccoli, butter, cabbage, candy, cauliflower, celery, cereal, cheese, chicken, chocolate, coffee, corn, cream, fish, flour, fruit, ice cream, lettuce, meat, milk, oil, pasta, rice, salt, spinach, sugar, tea, water, wine, yogurt

◇ **Certain nonfood substances:** air, cement, coal, dirt, gasoline, gold, paper, petroleum, plastic, rain, silver, snow, soap, steel, wood, wool

◇ **Most abstract nouns:** advice, anger, beauty, confidence, courage, employment, fun, happiness, health, honesty, information, intelligence, knowledge, love, poverty, satisfaction, truth, wealth

◇ **Areas of study:** history, math, biology, etc.

◇ **Sports:** soccer, football, baseball, hockey, etc.

◇ **Languages:** Chinese, Spanish, Russian, English, etc.

◇ **Other:** clothing, equipment, furniture, homework, jewelry, luggage, lumber, machinery, mail, money, news, poetry, pollution, research, scenery, traffic, transportation, violence, weather, work

- Geographical names are confusing because some require the and some do not.

◇ **Use *the* with:** united countries, large regions, deserts, peninsulas, oceans, seas, gulfs, canals, rivers, mountain ranges, groups of islands

the Gobi Desert

the United Arab Emirates

the Sacramento River

the Aleutians

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◇ **Do not use *the* with:** streets, parks, cities, states, counties, most countries, continents, bays, single lakes, single mountains, islands

Japan

Chico

Mt. Everest

San Francisco Bay

Examples of the Use of Articles

*I do not want **a** gun in my house (any gun).*

***The** gun is in his closet (implies there is a specific gun).*

I am afraid of guns (all guns in general).

*She sent me **a** postcard from Italy (an unspecified postcard - not a letter, not an e-mail).*

*It's **the** postcard that I have in my office (one specific postcard).*

Getting postcards makes me want to travel (any postcard in general).

*I have **a** dog (one dog).*

***The** dog is very friendly (the dog that I have already mentioned).*

Dogs make great pets (dogs in general).

Greta needs furniture in her apartment (furniture is a noncount noun).

*She is going to select **the** furniture that she needs (the specific furniture that she needs).*

*She hopes to find **some** furniture this weekend (an unspecified, limited amount of furniture).*

*We are going to see **the** Statue of Liberty this weekend (the only Statue of Liberty).*

Questions with Answers

EXERCISE-1

1. I bought _____ new phone yesterday.
2. Have you ever been to _____ Eiffel Tower?
3. She is reading _____ interesting book.
4. Can you pass me _____ salt, please?
5. We went to _____ amazing concert last night.
6. He wants to adopt _____ cat from the shelter.
7. They live in _____ old house by the river.
8. Would you like _____ cup of tea?
9. _____ elephant is the largest land mammal.
10. I met _____ artist at the gallery yesterday.

Answers:

1. I bought **a** new phone yesterday.
2. Have you ever been to **the** Eiffel Tower?
3. She is reading **an** interesting book.
4. Can you pass me **the** salt, please?
5. We went to **an** amazing concert last night.
6. He wants to adopt **a** cat from the shelter.
7. They live in **an** old house by the river.
8. Would you like **a** cup of tea?
9. **The** elephant is the largest land mammal.

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10. I met **an** artist at the gallery yesterday.

EXERCISE-2

1. She is an expert in _____ field of astrophysics.
2. We visited _____ ancient ruins in Rome last summer.
3. Can you pass me _____ wrench from _____ toolbox?
4. He is _____ only person I know who has climbed _____ Mount Everest.
5. My friend has _____ incredible collection of _____ rare stamps.
6. I would like to buy _____ house with _____ garden.
7. Did you read _____ article about _____ benefits of meditation?
8. We attended _____ opera at _____ famous theater downtown.
9. She is _____ skilled artist who specializes in _____ portraiture.
10. _____ apple a day keeps _____ doctor away.

Answers:

1. She is an expert in **the** field of astrophysics.
2. We visited **the** ancient ruins in Rome last summer.
3. Can you pass me **a** wrench from **the** toolbox?
4. He is **the** only person I know who has climbed **Mount Everest**.
5. My friend has **an** incredible collection of **rare stamps**.
6. I would like to buy **a** house with **a** garden.
7. Did you read **an** article about **the** benefits of meditation?
8. We attended **an** opera at **the** famous theater downtown.
9. She is **a** skilled artist who specializes in **portraiture**.
10. **An** apple a day keeps **the** doctor away.

EXERCISE TO WORK

1. He is _____ honest man.
2. We saw _____ movie last night.
3. She wants to become _____ astronaut.
4. _____ cat is sitting on _____ roof.
5. Can you hand me _____ pen from _____ desk?
6. I'd like _____ cup of coffee, please.
7. They live in _____ old house near _____ river.
8. Have you ever climbed _____ Mount Kilimanjaro?
9. I found _____ interesting book at _____ bookstore.
10. _____ elephant in _____ zoo looks very happy.

Answers:

1. He is **an** honest man.
2. We saw **a** movie last night.
3. She wants to become **an** astronaut.
4. **A** cat is sitting on **the** roof.
5. Can you hand me **a** pen from **the** desk?
6. I'd like **a** cup of coffee, please.
7. They live in **an** old house near **the** river.
8. Have you ever climbed **Mount Kilimanjaro**?
9. I found **an** interesting book at **the** bookstore.
10. **The** elephant in **the** zoo looks very happy.

