



# USING ARTICLES (A, AN, THE)

What are articles?

Articles are three tricky words: 'the' (called the definite article), 'a' and 'an' (together referred to as indefinite articles).

If you are unsure when to use these words and when to avoid them, you are not alone.

Do I need to use an article? Which one? First, it helps to know the difference between countable and uncountable nouns. Countable nouns can be counted and have a plural form, e.g. *two skis, three wins*. Uncountable nouns cannot be counted and don't have a plural form, e.g. *water, information, research*.

The indefinite article



We use the indefinite article with non-unique, singular countable nouns, e.g. *there is a tutorial each week; she found an antidote to that poison*.

'A' and 'an' are used in various situations:

Instance	Example
Jobs	She is <b>an</b> actor
Beliefs	My friend is <b>a</b> Muslim
Numbers	<b>A</b> dozen people attended
Prices	It is \$5 <b>a</b> kilo
Speeds	45km <b>a</b> hour
Nationalities	He is <b>a</b> n Australian citizen

The definite article

We can use the definite article with:

- ☐☐ Singular countable nouns, e.g. *The lecturer is late.*
- ☐☐ Plural nouns, e.g. *The mice are alive*
- ☐☐ Uncountable nouns, e.g. *The information is very dated.*

We also use the definite article when something is **unique**, e.g. *The sun is shining; The earth is beautiful.*

We also use 'the' in the following instances:

- ☐☐ Some geographic names, e.g. *The Bahamas, The Arctic Sea, The Pilbara.*
- ☐☐ Spoken dates, e.g. *The first of May.*
- ☐☐ Superlatives, e.g. *The best meal I've had; The tallest building in the world.*

Known and unknown nouns

We use:

- ☐☐ 'a/an' when the topic is unknown to the reader or listener; and
- ☐☐ 'the' when the topic is known, e.g. *The Australian Research Council funded a project investigating the effects of climate change in 2018.*

Sometimes the context or a phrase makes a situation/person known, e.g.

- ☐☐ *Meet me at the café near the Science Library.*
- ☐☐ *Is the guest lecturer here? Yes, she is in the seminar room already.*

A common use in academic writing

The + noun + of, e.g. *the development of Australia's educational system; the effects of market liberalisation.*

No articles

We do not need to use articles for generalisations in the following cases:

☐☐ General ideas, e.g.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Religion is an important consideration.*

☐☐ Countable, plural nouns, e.g. *Seminars are instructive [the example, 'The seminars are instructive', would refer to a specific set of seminars].*

☐☐ Uncountable nouns, e.g. *Information from the internet is frequently inaccurate [Adding an article before the word 'Information' would be incorrect].*

Similarly, no articles are used for:

☐☐ Mealtimes, e.g. *Have you had lunch?*

☐☐ Sports, e.g. *She plays rugby and golf.*

☐☐ Most places and geographic features, e.g. *Perth, Spain, Asia, Mount Doom.*

☐☐ Most illnesses, e.g. *She has whooping cough, and he has leukaemia.*

☐☐ Some idioms, e.g. *To be on time; to learn by heart.*

TIP

Sometimes articles are unpredictable and there is no clear rule about their use.

We go to the post office, but we go to school and go home.

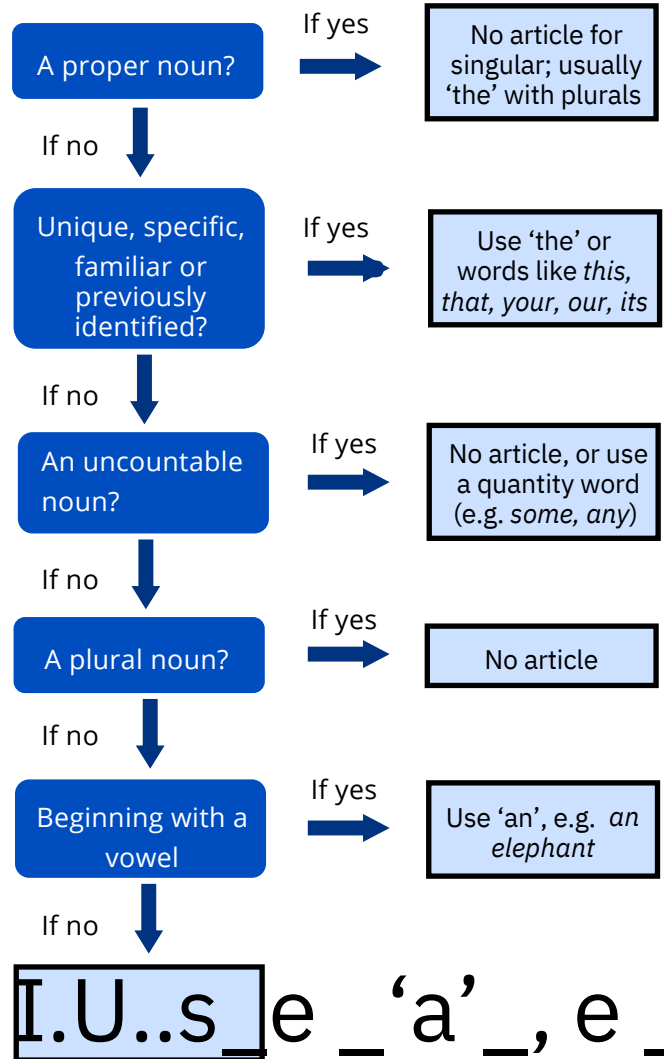
We wake in the morning and study in the

afternoon but sleep at night.

Choosing an article (flowchart)

You can use the flowchart below to decide when you should use articles and what articles you should use.

Is the noun...



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