**A - AN - THE**

**Definite and Indefinite articles in English.**

**A - AN   :**

**A**and **AN** are **indefinite articles** used with a singular countable noun.  
An**indefinite** article means that we do not know which person or thing is referred to, or it is of no importance.  
  
**Which to use:  'a' or 'an'?**  
The rule states that **'a'**should be used before words that begin with consonants (b, c ,d etc.), while **'an'** should be used before words that begin with vowels (a,e,i, etc.).  
  
**However, it should be noted that the usage is determined by pronunciation** and not by spelling, and this includes abbreviations and acronyms.

**A** is used before a word that begins with **a consonant or a consonant sound** :

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| • a consonant (b, c, d, f, g, etc.) : | **a** **m**an /**a** **t**able /**a** **g**ame /**a d**og /**a** **c**ar |
| • a vowel that is **pronounced like "yu"** : | **a** **Eu**ropean /**a** **u**niversity/**a** **u**ser |
| • the vowel 'o' when it has a **'w' sound** | **a one**-way street / **a one**-track mind |

**An** is used before a word that begins with a **vowel or a vowel sound**:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| • a vowel  (a, e, i, o, u, etc.) : | **an**animal /**an** elevator**/ an** orange |
| • an **unaspirated 'h'** : | **an** hour/**an**honest man/**an** heir |
| • an abbreviation starting with a **vowel sound**: | **an** MBA, **an** MD (**'em'**sound) |

**THE :  
  
The** is a **definite article** used to talk about something specific.

* **The**town where Julie lives is very big.
* What book is Julie reading? She's reading**the**book she got for her birthday.
* Let's make **a** cake. We'll make **the** cake you like best.

**The** is also used to refer to:

* Rivers, seas, oceans :
  + **the** Mississippi river,**the** Mediterranean sea, **the** Atlantic ocean
* Nationalities :
  + **the** British, **the**Americans,**the** Japanese,**the** Chinese, etc.

**Note:** **Pronunciation**  
Normally, **"the"** is pronounced with a short sound (the cat, the dog...), but when "the" comes before a vowel sound, it is pronounced with a long sound [thee] ( the army, the event, the opposition, the umbrella...).  
  
**NO ARTICLE** :  
  
**No article** is used in **generalisations:**

* I like music
* Children can be noisy.
* Frozen food is handy.
* I watch television but I listen to**the**radio and I go to**the** cinema.
* I don't play tennis but I play **the** piano,**the** guitar, etc.

**No article** is used for **place names** (towns, countries, states, mountains, lakes) :

* London, Spain, America, Long Island, Mount Everest, Loch Ness ...

**Except** if plural :

* **The** Greek islands, **The** United States, **The** Alps, **The** Himalayas ...