Articles—Worksheet

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| **What are articles?**   * In English, we use the articles “a,” “an,” and “the.” * Articles are parts of speech that announce nouns. * They appear before a noun. * They give the reader information about the noun. They tell us if the noun is specific or general. For example, if I mention “a cookie,” I’m talking about cookies in general. If I mention “the cookie,” I’m talking about a specific cookie. * In some cases, you do not need to use any article at all. |

**What is a noun?**

We know that articles give information about nouns. So, to use articles properly, we must understand what nouns are.

**Nouns** are the names of people, places, things, activities, or ideas. **Here are some examples:**

People: Harry Potter, nurse, student

Places: Valencia, College of the Canyons, mall

Things: phone, pizza, skateboard

Activities: hiking, surfing, skating

Ideas: love, equality, democracy

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| **Types of Nouns:**   * **Count Nouns:** It is possible to count individual items. Count nouns can be singular or plural. For example, “pencil” is a count noun. If I had a box of pencils in front of me, I could count the individual pencils in the box. * **Noncount Nouns:** It is not possible to count individual items. Noncount nouns cannot be made plural. For example, “gasoline” is a noncount noun. If I had a gallon of gasoline in front of me, I could not count the individual gasolines.   *Note:* Some nouns may be countable in another language, but not in English.   * **Gerunds:** Present participles used as a noun. Gerunds cannot be preceded by “the.” For example, I could tell you, “Running is difficult.” In this sentence, “running” is used as a noun. |

**Indefinite Articles: A/An**

**What is an indefinite article?**

The indefinite articles are “a” and “an.” They show that the noun can refer to any member of a group.

Example 1: *My son wants* ***a*** *car for his eighteenth birthday.*

This sentence refers to any car. We don’t know which specific car that he wants.

Example 2: ***An*** *ant can lift twenty times its own body weight.*

This sentence refers to any ant. There are many ants in the world, and this sentence could describe any of them.

**Use indefinite articles to show membership.**

Examples:

* Miguel is a salsa dancer. (There is a large group of salsa dancers, and Miguel is one member.)
* Lavpreet is a practicing Hindu. (Lavpreet is a member of the group of people known as Hindus.)

**Use an indefinite article to tell readers:**

* The noun is singular
* The noun is a member of a large group
* The noun represents the whole group

Example: **A** dragonfly can travel up to 60 mph.

In this example, we are discussing one dragonfly (singular), but it is a member of a large group of all the dragonflies in the world. The dragonfly in our sentence represents all dragonflies.

**Where indefinite articles DO NOT go:**

1. Do not use “a” or “an” before a proper noun (the name of a person or place).

Incorrect: Carolina wants to take her picture in front of **an** Eiffel Tower.

Correct: Carolina wants to her picture in front of **the** Eiffel Tower.

1. Do not use “a” or “an” before plural or noncount nouns.

Incorrect: Susan bought **a** watermelons to make fruit salad.

Correct: Susan bought watermelons to make fruit salad.

Incorrect: The car needs **a** gas before we can drive to San Diego.

Correct: The car needs gas before we can drive to San Diego.

1. Do not use “a” or “an” before a pronoun (a word that replaces a noun).

Incorrect: I’ve been looking for **a** him.

Correct: I’ve been looking for him.

1. Do not use “a” or “an” before an adjective without a noun after it.

Incorrect: Nancy prefers the dress in **a** green.

Correct: Nancy prefers the dress in green.

**“A” or “An?”**

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| When do I use “a?” | When do I use “an?” |
| Use the indefinite article **a** before nouns that start with consonant sounds (b, d, k, t, etc.).   * A rocket * A shell * A whale   Use **a** when a word begins with a “yoo” or “wuh” as a consonant sound.   * A university * A one hundred dollar bill | Use the indefinite article **an** before nouns that start with vowel sounds (a, e, i, o, u, etc.)   * An iceberg * An eagle * An olive   Use **an** when using a letter of the alphabet that begins with a vowel sound   * Draw **an “x”** on the paper. * I’m going to **an NAACP**-sponsored event.   Use **an** when using a word that begins with “h,” but the “h” sound is silent   * An hour * An honest person |

**Common Phrases and Idioms (Sayings) that Use “A” or “An:”**

1. Once a day / a week / a month / a year
2. Two (or any number over one) times a day / a week
3. An hour after midnight / noon / sunrise
4. Half an hour earlier / later
5. A pair of socks / a couple of times / a number of items
6. Sound like a broken record: to repeat the same thing over and over
7. A horse of a different color: a completely different matter.
8. A chip on one’s shoulder: to have a bad attitude
9. Don’t judge a book by its cover: don’t judge something by its outward appearance
10. A slap on the wrist: a light punishment for doing something wrong
11. A piece of cake: something very easy
12. At a glance: to understand something almost immediately

**Definite Article: The**

**What is a definite article?**

The definite article is “the.” It shows that the noun refers to a specific member of a group.

Example 1: ***The*** *house is decorated with lights*.

The sentence refers to a specific house. It does not apply to any house, but to one particular house.

Example 2: Aziz was afraid to disturb **the** bee hive.

The sentence refers to one particular bee hive.

**Definite Article Rules:**

1. The definite article “the” can be used before count OR noncount nouns.

Examples:

* **The** textbook I bought yesterday was expensive. (“Textbook” is a count noun.)
* Sara wasted **the** money her mother gave her on candy and stickers. (“Money” is a noncount noun.)

1. The definite article “the” can be used before singular OR plural nouns.

Examples:

* Did you see **the** movie I recommended? (“Movie” is singular.)
* Did you taste **the** grapes I gave you? (“Grapes” are plural.)

1. Use the definite article “the” when there is only one of something (a unique or singular object).

Examples:

* the world, the sun, the earth, the moon, the sky, etc.
* Neil Armstrong was the first man on **the moon**.

1. Use the definite article “the” before certain nouns.

Examples:

* the movies, the theater, the radio, the internet, the post office, the bank, the station, etc.
* I have to go to **the bank** before I can meet you at **the movies**.

1. Use “the” before musical instruments when discussing the instrument in general.

Examples:

* I studied **the piano** for five years before I fell in love with **the drums**.
* Jae thinks **the tuba** is the most difficult instrument to play in marching band because it is so heavy.

1. Use “the” when talking about a type of animal.

Examples:

* Today’s dogs are descendants of **the wolf**.
* **The housefly** lives only two weeks.

1. Use “the” when talking about a group of people.

Examples:

* After graduating college, Sam wanted to help **the homeless**.
* Lisa was surprised to see just how much **the young** use their cell phones.

**Proper nouns that use “the:”**

Proper nouns name specific nouns. For example, “Los Angeles” is the name of a specific city. It is a proper noun.

1. Use “the” if the proper noun uses the pattern “the…of.”

* The Fourth of July
* The University of California

1. Use “the” with plural proper nouns.

* The Los Angeles Dodgers
* The Black Keys

1. Use “the” with collective proper nouns (a noun that names a group).

* The Justice League
* The Sierra Club

**Geographical Rules:**

1. Use “the” before the names of oceans, seas, rivers, forests, mountain ranges, and deserts (but not lakes).

* I saw **the Mississippi River** when I visited New Orleans.
* Lake Havasu is located in **the Mojave Desert**.

1. Use “the” before points on the globe and geographical areas.

* Peter crossed **the equator** to visit **the South Pole**.
* My cousins from **the Middle East** are visiting for a month.

1. Use “the” before the names of some specific countries and cities (but not all).

* Maria’s mother had always dreamed of moving to **the United States**.
* I wanted to visit the tulip fields in **the Netherlands**.

**Leaving Out Articles**

**When do we leave out articles?**

1. Do not use an article when generalizing about plural count nouns.

* Elephants are intelligent creatures. (“Elephants” are plural count nouns.)
* You should always recycle used water bottles (“Bottles” are plural count nouns.)

1. Do not use an article when generalizing about noncount nouns.

* Time is money. (Both “time” and “money” are noncount nouns.)
* Furniture enhances the beauty of a room. (“Furniture” is a noncount noun.)

1. Do not use an article before a gerund when making a general statement.

* Skiing is a winter sport. (“Skiing” is a gerund.)
* The boy’s parents taught him that lying is wrong. (“Lying” is a gerund.)

1. Do not use an article with names of languages or nationalities.

* Sevan speaks four languages: Armenian, Farsi, German, and English.
* When Sally went to Seoul as an exchange student, she was looking forward to making Korean friends.

1. Do not use an article when using the name of sports.

* He wanted to play basketball professionally.
* Canada won the gold medal in hockey.

1. Do not use an article when using the names of academic subjects.

* She needs to pass math before she can begin her engineering classes.
* Geology is the study of the Earth, including rocks and volcanoes.

**Geographical Rules:**

Do not use articles before the names of:

* Most countries or territories (Canada, China, Puerto Rico)
* Towns, cities, or states (Valencia, Paris, California)
* Streets (Front Street, Lakewood Avenue, Dogwood Crescent)
* Lakes: (Lake Ontario, Lake Placid, Big Bear Lake)
* Mountains (Mount Everest, K2, Mount Kilimanjaro)
* Continents (North America, Africa, Antarctica)
* Islands (Hawaii, Crete, Kodiak)

***Please note:*** There are some exceptions to these rules, such as “the Matterhorn” (a mountain). You should look up unfamiliar place names before using them in a sentence.

Exercises

**Exercise 1:**

*Instructions:* For each sentence, select “a,” “an,” “the,” or “no article.”

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| 1. Fatima is \_\_ nurse. | a | an | the | no article |
| 1. Did Mike get \_\_ job he applied for? | a | an | the | no article |
| 1. Would you like to eat \_\_ orange? | a | an | the | no article |
| 1. Have you looked at \_\_ stars tonight? | a | an | the | no article |
| 1. Watching \_\_ TV is my favorite pastime activity. | a | an | the | no article |
| 1. Children bring joy to \_\_ world. | a | an | the | no article |
| 1. I haven’t been to \_\_ movies for a long time. | a | an | the | no article |
| 1. Bina goes to her favorite park at least twice \_\_ week. | a | an | the | no article |
| 1. Go to \_\_ bed when you are done with your homework. | a | an | the | no article |
| 1. In general, I think \_\_ dogs are very friendly. | a | an | the | no article |
| 1. \_\_ old deserve our respect. | a | an | the | no article |
| 1. \_\_ Lake Victoria is beautiful. | a | an | the | no article |
| 1. We drove along \_\_ LA River . | a | an | the | no article |
| 1. You just took a test. Was \_\_ test easy? | a | an | the | no article |

**Exercise 2:**

*Instructions:* Read the below paragraphs and insert articles where necessary.

A 6-week-old cheetah cub at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park is spending lots of time with his (no article) new dog companion. The young cheetah, Ruuxa, was chosen to be raised as an animal ambassador at the Safari Park after (no article) he was rejected by his mother and had to be hand raised by keepers.

(no article) cheetahs are usually born in litters of three to five cubs; when a singleton [a single cub] is born, the mother often rejects the cub since the chance of the cub surviving in the wild would be minimal. The cheetah cub and puppy, a7-week-old Rhodesian ridgeback puppy named Raina, are being introduced by animal care staff at the Safari Park. The puppy will be raised with the cheetah and serve as (no article) his lifelong companion.

Safari Park cheetahs selected for training as (no article) ambassadors are paired early in life with a domestic dog. As the two companions grow up together, the dog’s body language will communicate to the cheetah that there’s nothing to fear in new or public surroundings, which relaxes and calms the cheetah.

**Source:**

San Diego Zoo. “New Cheetah Cub for San Diego Zoo Safari Park’s Ambassador Program.” *San Diego Zoo*. San Diego Zoo, 10 June 2014. Web. 23 July 2014.

Self-Reflection

Write a brief paragraph (3-5 sentences) answering the following questions:

* What was the most important thing you learned in this workshop?
* How will you use this in your college classes?