

# Definite and indefinite articles

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## What is an article?

Basically, **articles** are either *definite* or *indefinite*. They combine with a noun to indicate the type of reference being made by the noun.

- The **definite** article is **the**.
- The **indefinite** article is **a / an**.

## The indefinite article *a* or *an*:

The article **a / an** is used when we don't specify the things or people we are talking about:

- I met **a** friend.
- I work in **a** factory in New York.
- I borrowed **a** pencil from **a** passenger sitting next to me.

The indefinite article **a** is used before a consonant sound:

- **a** dog.
- **a** pilot
- **a** teacher.
- **a** university

NOTE:

Although 'university' starts with the vowel 'u', it is not pronounced as such. It is pronounced as a consonant sound /ju:ˌnɪvɜːsɪ.ti/

The indefinite article **an** is used before a vowel sound:

- **an** engineer.
- **an** elephant.
- **an** athlete

## The definite article *the*:

It's used when the speaker talks about a specific object that both the person speaking and the listener know.

- **The** car over there is fast.
- **The** president of the United States is giving a speech tonight.

When we speak of something or someone for the first time we use **a** or **an**, the next time we repeat that object we use the definite article **the**.

- I live in **a** house. **The** house is quite old and has four bedrooms.
- I ate in **a** Chinese restaurant. **The** restaurant was very good.

## No article:

1. Do not use an article with countries, states, counties or provinces, lakes and mountains except when the country is a collection of states such as "**The** United States".

- He lives in **Washington** near **Mount Rainier**.
- They live in **Northern British Columbia**.
- They climbed **Mount Everest**.

2. we do not normally use an article with plurals and uncountable nouns to talk about things in general.:

- He writes books.
- She likes sweets.
- Do you like jazz music?
- She ate bread with butter in the morning.

3. We don't use an article for meals: we say lunch, not *the lunch*

4. We don't use an article to talk about sports: we say hockey, not *the* hockey

5. We don't use an article to talk about a disease: he has cancer, not *the* cancer.

6. We don't use an article for seasons or days of the week: She hates winter, They have soccer practice on Tuesday.

7. For languages and school subjects, we don't use articles: I'm studying French and Mathematics.

8. For materials and any abstract noun, we don't use an article: Gold and diamonds are valuable, Music is relaxing.

9. Plural indefinite nouns do not take an article: Paper is made from trees.

## Countable and uncountable nouns

Using English articles with countable and uncountable nouns may be confusing.

**The** can be used with *uncountable* nouns, or the article can be dropped entirely as mentioned above.

1. "The two countries reached **the** peace after a long disastrous war" (some specific peace treaty) or "The two countries reached peace after a long disastrous war" (any peace).
2. "He drank **the** water" (some specific water- for example, the water his wife brought him from the kitchen) or "He drank water." (any water)

It is unusual to use **a/an** for uncountable nouns. You can't say "~~I'd like a milk~~"

**a/an** can be used only with *countable* nouns.

1. I'd like a piece of cake.
2. I lent him a book.
3. I drank a cup of tea.