Articles

Articles are words that introduce nouns. To choose the correct article, you must first determine whether the noun that it refers to is 1) countable or uncountable and 2) specific or non-specific.

Countable or uncountable

Countable nouns can refer to one thing (singular) or to two or more things (plural). Uncountable nouns are neither singular nor plural; they refer to things that cannot be numbered, such as abstract concepts, fields of study, games or sports, gases, liquids, materials, and particles or grains.

Certain nouns (like meat, stone, style, and time) can be countable or uncountable depending on the context.

- She drank a glass of water. (Countable)
- The window is made of glass. (Uncountable)

If the noun is countable, you must determine whether it is specific or non-specific. (See below.)

If the noun is uncountable, do not use an article.

- There is a lot of sand on the floor.
- Every winter, I give clothing to the poor.

Specific or non-specific

Specific nouns refer to a particular member of a category; they point to a precise person or thing that can be identified. Non-specific nouns refer to a category or to an undefined member of a category; they point to a broader group of persons or things.

If the noun is specific, use "the".

- The doctor said that I should stay in bed. (As opposed to: My wife is a doctor.)
- Stella took the dogs to the park. (As opposed to: I love dogs.)

If the noun is non-specific and singular, use "a" or "an".

- A plan is essential for this task. (As opposed to: We followed the plan that I established.)
- He walked in the rain without an umbrella. (As opposed to: She lost the umbrella that I lent to her.)

If the noun is non-specific and plural, do not use an article.

- Mike and Mitch are teachers. (As opposed to: Mike is a teacher.)
- Tigers are dangerous animals. (As opposed to: This child is acting like an animal.)