ARTICLES

The three articles, *a*, *an* and *the*, are a specific type of adjective. You will always find them associated with nouns. Articles define a noun as specific or non-specific and can also indicate singular or plural. For example, *a* noisy dog (non-specific) versus *the* noisy dog next door (specific), or *the* noisy dogs (plural) are disturbing the neighbours.

**Indefinite Article**

A and *an* are indefinite articles because they refer to any non-specific person (a teacher), place (a house), or thing (a car). Indefinite articles can only be used for a singular, countable noun. *An* is used when the noun it is describing begins with a vowel or a vowel sound (eg. *an* elephant, *an* hour). *A* and *an* cannot be used with non-countable nouns (sugar, democracy, information, etc.), or plural nouns (tables, people, etc.).

**Definite Article**

The definite article, *the*, is the most common word in the English language. The use of *the* indicates a specific person (*the* cashier), place (*the* hospital), or thing (*the* computer). You can use the definite article with both countable and non-countable nouns when you are referring to a specific instance. For example, *the* water (non-countable), or *the* trees (countable).

**How to Use Articles**

A singular countable noun must always have an article (*a* or *the* window depending on whether we are referring to a window in general, or a specific window).

Articles are placed just before a noun or in front of any adjectives modifying a noun.

I would like a sweater for my birthday. (general)

I would like the blue, striped sweater from The Gap for my birthday. (specific)

Subsequent mentions of a noun must use *the*.

A child (general) is riding a bicycle. The child (specific to the one we just mentioned) is wearing a helmet (general). The helmet is red (specific).

**No article Required**

Languages, such as French or Spanish (unless referring to people from that country)

French is a beautiful language. The French produce excellent wine.

Sports, like baseball (unless referring to the ball itself) or swimming

Baseball is a fun game to play. A baseball is a good gift for a 12 year-old boy.

Subjects such as Biology or Math

Anatomy is the study of living organ systems. The anatomy of the heart is fascinating.

Countries, Cities, and Streets

Halifax is located on the Atlantic coast of Canada.

Mass nouns or general non-countable nouns (unless referring to specific cases)

Cows (mass noun, no article) like grass (general noun, no article).

The cows in Mr. Green’s field like the tall grass. (specific cows and specific grass).

Concepts such as Freedom, Ideas, or Research

Information (concept in general) can be found on our website. The information (specific case) on your website is very useful.