

Articles

the vs. a/an

the

Use **the** when you refer to something specific, something you've already mentioned before, or if there is only one. (i.e. "The cat with the blue eyes belongs to my neighbor.")

a/an

Use **a/an** when you refer to a singular countable noun that is general (i.e. "I would like to pet a cat.")

a vs. an

a

Use **a** for nouns that start with a consonant sound (a boy, a car, a university)

an

Use **an** for nouns that start with a vowel sound (an egg, an apple, an hour, an HIV patient)

In order to decide whether you need an article, you need to figure out if the noun is count or non-count.

Count nouns

Anything you can count (e.g., cats, berries, dreams)

Note: Singular, count nouns always require an article.

*Can you put an -s on the end of a word? Then it's probably **countable**.*

singular	a /an / the	a protest, an idea, the corner
plural	the* / x	the dancers, people
general	a / an	a window, an eagle
specific	the	the bathroom window

x = no article necessary

** = Remember to only use **the** if the noun is **specific**, a noun you've **already mentioned** before, or there is **only one**.*

Non-count nouns

Anything you cannot count (i.e. health, air, bread)

general	x	heaven, laughter
specific	the	the logic, the furniture

Do I need an article?

As with most English rules, the short answer is "maybe." While every rule has its exceptions, this flow chart is designed to help you decide whether your noun warrants an article. All singular, count nouns require an article. When in doubt, a Google search of your noun is a quick way to see whether others tend to use an article with your noun and in which cases.

