# Articles

## countable nouns

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a / an / the</th>
<th>a protest, an idea, the corner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>singular</td>
<td></td>
<td>the dancers, people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plural</td>
<td>the* / x</td>
<td>a window, an eagle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>general</td>
<td>a / an</td>
<td>the bathroom window</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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 of that type of noun.

## noncountable nouns

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>the* / x</th>
<th>the attention, smog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>singular</td>
<td></td>
<td>the clothes, jewelry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plural</td>
<td>the* / x</td>
<td>heaven, laughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>general</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>the logic, the furniture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specific</td>
<td>the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 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)
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. 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.

is your noun...

- general?
  - is it countable?
    - no
      - you shouldn't need an article
        - Give me permission. She needs water.
    - yes
      - how many?
        - more than one
          - Is this noun already part of the discussion?
            - yes
              - the
              - How are the salads there?
            - no
              - you shouldn't need an article
              - Do you like carrots?
        - just 1
          - does it start with a...
            - vowel?
            - consonant?
  - specific?
    - the
      - Open the back door. The king has returned.
    - you shouldn't need an article
      - Would you like an omelette?
    - a
      - We should take a trip.