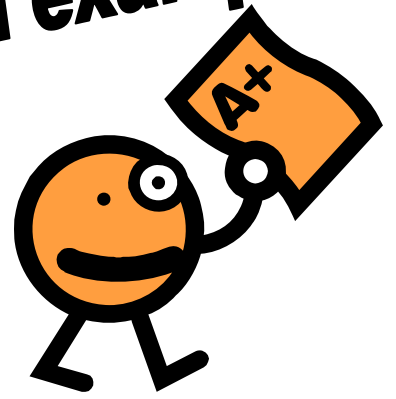


ARTICLES: Rules of usage and examples



A and *AN* are indefinite articles which identify nouns in a general sense.

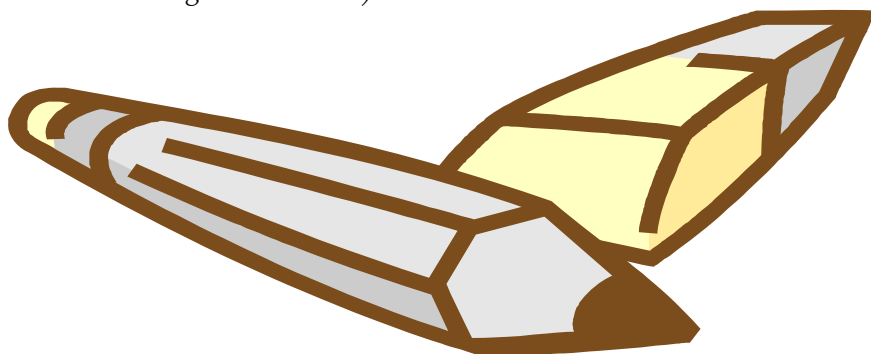
Choose *a* or *an* according to pronunciation, not spelling: put *a* before a consonant sound, put *an* before a vowel sound.

H and *U* at the beginning of a word may have the sound of a consonant or the sound of vowel (example: *a history class, an honor to be here/a unique experience, an understanding teacher*).

Y always has the sound of a consonant at the beginning of a word.

Use *a(n)* in these ways:

- *Before an **unidentified singular** countable noun that is one example of its class or kind. (*A dog is standing at the door. Would you like an apple?*)
- *Before an **unidentified singular** countable noun that is representative of its class, as in a **definition**. (*A dog is a popular pet. An apple is a kind of fruit.*)
- *Before a **singular** predicate noun after a form of *be*. (*My sister was a good teacher. English can be a complicated language.*)
- *With uncountable nouns to mean *(a) kind of, or certain*. (*The man has an honesty that we all appreciate. Literature of other countries gives us an insight into their cultures.*)
- *Before *few* and *little* to mean *some but not many*. (*Only a few students did well on the exam. A little patience is needed when watching small children.*)





The is the definite article which identifies nouns in a more specific sense. *The* can be used before uncountable, or mass, nouns in both the singular and plural forms.

Use *the* in these ways:

- *Before a noun that shows reference **backward to a noun already mentioned**. (*I heard a dog barking for an hour, and when I looked out my window, the dog was in my yard! A man waiting at the bus stop turned out to be the principal.*)
- *Before a noun that shows reference **forward to identification soon to be made**, often by modifiers following the noun. (*The man on the phone wants to speak to you. All students should know the history of their own countries.*)
- *Before superlatives and **ordinal numbers**. (*This is the best cake I have ever eaten! What country has the world's largest population?*) Note: Ordinal numbers used alone may have NO article. (*She was first in her class all throughout high school.)Our team was second in the league at the beginning of the season.*)
- *Before a noun used in a **context known** to both writer and reader. (*Sit at the desk in front.* [The desk is in the classroom.] *Did you go to the beach this summer?* [The beach nearby is known to all.]
- *Before a noun used as **identification of a class**, especially in a generalization. (*The honeybee is the only insect that produces food for people. The elderly need help from the younger generation.*) Note: This is a formal usage commonly found in scientific and technical writing. The definite article is followed by either a singular noun or an adjective form.
- *Before a noun at the beginning of a **phrase containing an appositive**. (*Do this exercise first, the exercise on page 40. This is my friend, the one I was telling you about.*)



Use *some* in this way:

- *Before a noun of **non-specific quantity, plural counts, and non-counts (but not all members of a group)**. (*We need some software, some floppy disks, and some manuals for the new programs..*)



The Zero Article refers to using no article before a noun. There are times when you use neither *a(n)* or *the* before a noun.

Use the zero article (do NOT use either *a(n)*, *the*, or *some*) in the following ways:

- *To refer to all members of a class (*I don't like cats! Plants and animals need water to survive.*)
- *To distinguish one class or abstract quality from another. (*Roses, not daisies, are my favorite flower. Personality is more important than good looks.*)
- *To refer to an indefinite number. (*Lawyers make good salaries. The edge of the field was marked by trees.*)
- *With plural nouns after *be*. (*Most of my friends are students. His sisters are teachers, too.*)
- *With institutions and practices felt to be unique. (*School begins soon. Breakfast will be served late tomorrow.*)
- *With abstract nouns in generalizations, particularly in formal writing. (*Increase in sales in a direct result of the new advertising program. Discovery of a change in mole color should alarm the patient.*)
- *With set phrases, usually pairs. (*The storm will bring wind and rain. They lived happily as man and wife for 45 years.*)
- *With set prepositional phrases. (*I memorized the poem and can now recite it by heart. We traveled to Milwaukee by bus.*)
- *With nouns used in newspaper headlines, book captions, signs or labels. (*Entrance to Garage. Beware of Dog.*)

