

## The articles: a, an & the

An article is a word used to modify a noun, basically, it's an adjective. English has two types of articles: **the** (definite article) and **a/an** (indefinite articles). They're used very often and are very important for using English accurately.

### Indefinite articles

**A** and **an** are indefinite articles used to refer to a **singular countable noun**. These articles are used to refer to any member of a group or class. The speaker doesn't tell us exactly which one he or she is referring to.

**Use a/an for naming a member of a group:**

#### EXAMPLES

- Mrs. Doudtfire is **a** nanny / Oscar works as **an** engineer (Jobs).
- Diego Armando Maradona is **an** Argentine (Nationalities).
- Barbara is **a** Jewish (Religions).

### THE USE OF THE INDEFINITE ARTICLE "A"

**1) "A" is used before a consonant (b, c, d, etc.)**

#### EXAMPLES

- a car.
- a dog.
- a Friday.
- a tiny nose.
- a 15 year-old boy.
- a year / week (time).
- a kilo / mile (measurements). Also using "one" instead of "a" is correct.

**2) "A" is used before a vowel but consonant sound**

#### EXAMPLES

- a university. [ju:]
- a unit. ['ju:]
- a European. [jʊ]
- a one (1). [w]

**3) “A” is used before a pronounced “h”**

EXAMPLE

- a horse [h].

**THE USE OF THE INDEFINITE ARTICLE “AN”**

**1) “An” is used before a vowel (a, e, i, etc.)**

EXAMPLES

- an orange.
- an eye.
- an alligator.

**2) “An” is used before an unpronounced (mute) “h”**

EXAMPLE

- an hour [a].
- an honest ['ɑ] (N. Amer.) - ['ɒ] Brit.
- an honor ['ɑ] (N. Amer.) - ['ɒ] Brit.
- an heir [ε] (N. Amer.) - [e] Brit.
- an herb [ɜ] (N. Amer.)

**3) “An” is used before a consonant but vowel sound**

EXAMPLES

- an “F”. [ɛ]
- an MBA. [ɛ]

## Definite article

**The** is a definite article used to refer to something specific (singular or plural nouns). The speaker talks about a particular (or known) member of a group.

### EXAMPLES

- **The** book on the table is about horror stories.
- Could you pass me **the** sugar, please?
- **The** movie was great.

## THE USE OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE “THE”

### 1) “The” is used before a noun which has already been previously mentioned

#### EXAMPLES

- I lost **the** wallet you gave me yesterday.
- They have a dog and two cats. **The** dog is Siberian husky.

### 2) “The” is used to indicate a noun that is unique or there is only one

#### EXAMPLES

- **The** President of United States lives in the White House.
- **The** Eiffel tower was built in 1889 to commemorate the French Revolution.
- **The** Nile is a river in Africa.
- Where is **the** bathroom?

### 3) “The” is used before superlative adjectives

#### EXAMPLES

- It's **the** largest river in the world.
- She is **the** most beautiful lady of all time.

## 4) “The” is used to talk about the whole population of a country or region

### EXAMPLES

- **The** British drink too much tea.
- **The** Romans invaded Britain in AD 43.
- **The** Mayans were famous for their architecture and astronomical knowledge.

HOWEVER: When generalizing about nationalities or a group of people, “the” is not usually used: “Americans eat a lot of hamburgers”.

## 5) “The” is used to indicate all the members of a family

### EXAMPLES

- **The** Simpsons live in Springfield.

## 6) “The” is used to talk about musical instruments

### EXAMPLE

- She plays **the** piano every day.

## 7) “The” is used to talk about directions (cardinal points)

### EXAMPLES

- **the** north.
- **the** south-east.