

Use of Articles

In English, articles are used to modify nouns in certain situations; they are not used before every noun. There are two types of articles: **indefinite** (**a, an**) and **definite** (**the**). Indefinite articles are used when the speaker or writer is talking about a non-specific member of a group, while a definite article is used for a specific member(s) of a group.

Indefinite Articles (**A/An**)

A: Use **a** to modify a non-specific, singular count noun that begins with a consonant sound.

An: Use **an** to modify a non-specific, singular count noun that begins with a vowel sound.

- **An elephant escaped from the zoo.** ("Elephant" is a singular, non-specific count noun that begins with a vowel.)

Definite Articles (**The**)

A definite article is used when a speaker is talking about a specific member of a group. The noun being modified can be either singular or plural, as well as count or noncount. Unlike indefinite articles, a definite article is used only when the noun is known to both the speaker and the listener. Below are a few examples:

- **The dishes need to be washed.** (The speaker is talking about a particular group of dishes that is a specific part of the group of all dishes.)

Note. If **a/an** has been used with a noun when it is first mentioned, the article changes to **the** when the same noun is mentioned later.

- **The local newspaper printed an article about pet health yesterday. The article discussed how to protect dogs from ticks.**

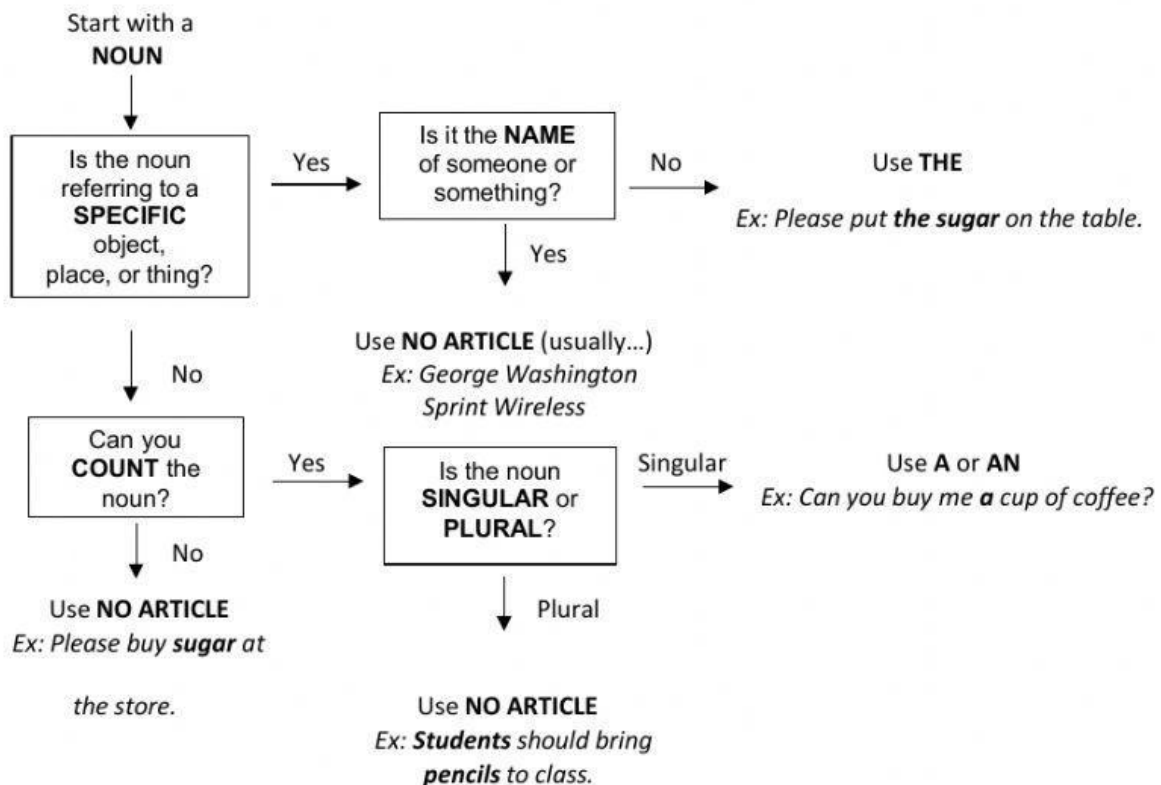
No Article

Certain nouns require neither an indefinite nor definite article before them. Here are a few of the most common guidelines:

- When making generalizations with plural nouns, no article is used.
 - **Peaches grow on trees.** (This is a general statement about peaches, which is a plural count noun.)
- No article is needed before abstract nouns.
 - **Education is important.** (The speaker is talking about the abstract concept of education which is something that can only be thought of and not physically sensed.)
- Most proper nouns do not need an article.
 - **Brazil is the largest country in South America.** (Country and continent names are proper nouns that do not need an article before them.)
 - **She can speak Spanish and French.** (Language names are also proper nouns that do not need an article.)

Flowchart

The flowchart below, shows the basic process of choosing an article:



Practice Exercise

Fill in the blank with the appropriate article, **a**, **an**, or **the**, or write **0** if no article is needed.

1. I want _____ apple from that basket.
2. _____ church on the corner is progressive.
3. Miss Lin speaks _____ Chinese.
4. I borrowed _____ pencil from your pile of pencils and pens.
5. One of the students said, " _____ professor is late today."
- 6 Eli likes to play _____ volleyball.
7. I bought _____ umbrella to go out in the rain.
8. My daughter is learning to play _____ violin at her school.
9. Please give me _____ cake that is on the counter.
10. I lived on _____ Main Street when I first came to town.
11. Albany is the capital of _____ New York State.
12. My husband's family speaks _____ Polish.
13. _____ apple a day keeps the doctor away.
14. _____ ink in my pen is red.
15. Our neighbors have _____ cat and _____ dog.
16. My mother is _____ English teacher. I am _____ student. When I get home from school, I watch _____ programs on TV. That's _____ best part of my day. _____ programs I watch are for _____ children. I am _____ child, so I think they are funny.
17. I'm _____ little excited because it's _____ Friday today. There are _____ lot of good shows on TV today. _____ one I usually watch at 3:30 is about _____ animals. Also, I'm excited because my mom is making _____ rice for dinner tonight.

