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Level: Master One

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Lesson2: Definite and Indefinite Articles

What is an article?

Basically, **articles** are either **definite** or **indefinite**. They combine to a noun to indicate the type of reference being made by the noun. In English there are three articles: **a**, **an**, and **the**.

- The **definite** article is **the**.
- The **indefinite** article is **a / an**
- **The definite article (the)** is used before a noun to indicate that the identity of the noun is known to the reader. **The indefinite article (a, an)** is used before a noun that is general or when its identity is not known. There are certain situations in which a noun takes no article.

The indefinite article *a* or *an*:

The article **a /an**: is used when we don't specify the things or people we are talking about or when its identity is not known:

I met **a** friend. /I think **an** animal is in the garage.

I work in **a** factory in New York.

The indefinite article “a”: is used before a consonant sound:

- **A** dog.
- **A** university

NOTE:

Although 'university' starts with the vowel 'u', it is not pronounced as such. It is pronounced as a consonant sound /ju:.niv3:.si.ti/

The indefinite article “an”: is used before a vowel sound:

- **An** engineer.
- **An** elephant.
- **An** athlete

The definite article *the*:

- ❖ It's used when the speaker talks about a specific object that both the person speaking and the listener know.
- The car over there is fast.
- The president of the United States is giving a speech tonight.

When we speak of something or someone for the first time we use **a** or **an**, the next time we repeat that object we use the definite article **the**.

- I live in a house. The house is quite old and has four bedrooms.
- I ate in a Chinese restaurant. The restaurant was very good.

No article:

1. **Do not use an article with countries, states, counties or provinces, lakes and mountains except when the country is a collection of states such as "The United States".**
- He lives in Washington near Mount Rainier.
 - They live in Northern British Columbia.
 - They climbed Mount Everest.

2. **All things or things in general: Use *no article* with plural count nouns or any non-count nouns used to mean *all* or *in general*.**
3. Trees are beautiful in the fall. (All trees are beautiful in the fall.)
He was asking for advice. (He was asking for advice in general.)
I do not like coffee. (I do not like all coffee in general.)

2. We do not normally use an article with plurals and uncountable nouns to talk about things in general:

- He writes books.
- She likes sweets.
- Do you like jazz music?
- She ate bread with butter in the morning.

Countable and uncountable nouns

Using English articles with **countable** and **uncountable** nouns may be confusing.

The can be used with *uncountable nouns*, or the article can be dropped entirely as mentioned above.

1. "The two countries reached **the** peace after a long disastrous war" (some specific peace treaty) or "The two countries reached peace after a long disastrous war" (any peace).
2. "He drank **the** water" (some specific water- for example, the water his wife brought him from the kitchen) or "He drank water." (any water)

It is unusual to use **a/an** for **uncountable nouns**. You can't say "~~I'd like a milk~~"

a/an can be used only with *countable nouns*.

1. I'd like **a** piece of cake.
2. I lent him **a** book.
3. I drank **a** cup of tea.

❖ **Definite article**

- **the** (before a singular or plural noun)

❖ **Indefinite article**

- **a** (before a singular noun beginning with a consonant sound)
- **an** (before a singular noun beginning with a vowel sound)
- Count nouns - refers to items that can be counted and are either singular or plural
- Non-count nouns - refers to items that are not counted and are always singular

❖ **Use the article *a* or *an* to indicate one in number (as opposed to more than one).**

- *I own a cat and two dogs.*

❖ **Sometimes an adjective comes between the article and noun:**

- an unhappy boy, a red apple , a red carpet.

The plural form of a or an is “some”. Use some to indicate an unspecified, limited amount (but more than one).

- an apple, some apples.