

Articles

APSU Writing Center Handout

Articles are short words used to signal or clarify a noun. The three articles in English are a, an, and the.

When to Use an Article

Use an article when describing a specific noun.

Leave it out when referring to something in general.

- **General noun:** I like books.
- **Specific noun:** I like the book about rabbits.

Indefinite Articles (A, An)

Indefinite articles (a, an) refer to nonspecific or general nouns, which are not yet known to the reader or listener.

A

Use **a** before words that begin with a consonant sound.

- **Examples:** a hat, a dog, a book, a student, a university

Use A when...

Introducing a noun.

- **Example:** I bought **a** new laptop yesterday.

Talking about one of many possible items.

- **Example:** She wants to adopt **a** cat.

Referring to a general category or type.

- **Example:** **A** teacher must be patient.

An

Use **an** before words that begin with a vowel sound (or words with a silent h).

- **Examples:** an apple, an hour, an honest man, an idea

Use An when...

Introducing a new noun starting with a vowel sound.

- **Example:** She saw **an** elephant at the zoo.

Referring to a general, singular noun starting with a vowel sound.

- **Example:** **An** education is important for success.

Definite Article (The)

The is used to describe a specific noun. It clarifies which person, place, or thing you mean and removes ambiguity.

Use The when...

Both singular and plural nouns are present.

- **Example:** The cats are sleeping.

Referring to a noun already introduced.

- **Example:** I have two cats, a gray female and a white male.