

Articles in English Sentence Structure

The – refers to a *particular or definite thing*; it can be used with a singular or plural noun.

- “The pencils need sharpening.” (referring to a specific group of pencils)
- “The blue pencil is my favorite.” (a particular pencil)

The can be used with *uncountable nouns* (nouns that cannot be counted) or it can be omitted depending on whether you are referring to a particular example of the noun. Some uncountable nouns are: grass, air, information.

- “I like to run in the grass.” (some specific area of grass)
- “I like to run in grass.” (any grass)
- “The book provided information on the subject of horses.” (information in general, not specific)
- “The information contained in the book was helpful.” (specific information)

Nouns that refer to qualities or concepts do not take an article: justice, peace, liberty.

- “Justice prevailed in the case.”
- “We sought peace in the region.”

A/An – refers to *non-particular or indefinite nouns*. The first time a noun is introduced use **a/an**, then when you refer to that same noun again use **the**.

- “A pencil is a useful tool.” (any pencil, not a particular one)
- “I want a bookshelf in my room. Then I can organize my books and magazines on the bookshelf.” (use “a” the first time you use the noun, then “the” afterwards.)

Some examples of when to use **a/an**:

“a” precedes a noun beginning with a consonant: a dog, a book, a tree

“an” precedes a noun beginning with a vowel: an orange, an octopus, an interest

However:

“an” is used with nouns that start with a silent “h”: an hour

“a” is used with nouns that start with an “h” that is pronounced: a house

“a” precedes a singular noun that starts with a “u” but sounds like a “y” (yoo): a university, a user.

Some nouns don't use an article: names of languages and nationalities, sports, and school subjects.

“English is spoken in America.”

“Football is a popular sport in Iowa City.”

“I enjoy studying history.”

With countries don't use “a” if the country's name is singular: “England” not “the England”, but use **the** with plural names of countries: “The United States,” “The Netherlands,” “The Soviet Union.”