

ARTICLES

The words *the*, *a* and *an* are called articles. Articles are adjectives because they are always used to modify nouns.

DEFINITE ARTICLE

The **definite** article *the* is used to point out or refer to a definite person, place, or object.

- The expression "*the store*," for instance, refers to a specific store, while the expression "*a store*" means any store without reference to a specific one.

Examples: *I need to go to **the** store downtown to buy fresh fish.*

*I need to go to **a** store for groceries. (Any store that sells groceries)*

- *The* with a **singular noun** sometimes indicates a **class** or **kind** of object.

Examples: ***The** scientist is not necessarily a researcher.*

***The** dinosaur is not extinct.*

***The** airplane is a relatively new invention.*

- For clarity, repeat the article before **two nouns** used in the same sentence.

Examples: *The matter has been referred to **the** secretary and **the** treasurer.*

*I found **an** anchor and **a** chain.*

*He waved **a** red and **a** white flag.*

Note—if the article is not repeated, the sentences would read like this:

*The matter has been referred to **the** secretary and treasurer.*

(Meaning that **one** person is both secretary and treasurer.)

*I found **an** anchor and chain.*

(Suggests that the chain is attached to the anchor)

*He waved **a** red and white flag.*

(Meaning **one** flag with **two** colors on it)

- An **adjective** preceded by *the* may be used as a plural noun.

Examples: ***The brave** are being honored today.*

***The rich** are not always without problems.*

***The strong** have an obligation to protect the weak.*

INDEFINITE ARTICLE

The **indefinite** article has two forms: *a* and *an*. They designate an object as merely one of a general class or kind.

- Use *a* before every word in which the first *sound* is a consonant. Also, *a* is used before words beginning with the *sound* of **y** or **w**. This rule also applies to all words beginning with **eu** and many beginning with **u**. (*Note that the initial sound is a consonant, not a vowel sound.*)

Examples: *a* uniform *a* university *a* year *a* eulogy *a* wish

Even though “uniform” and “university” begin with u, the u is pronounced as the consonant y.

- Use *a* before words beginning with **h** in which the **h** is sounded.

Examples: *a* history *a* hundred dollars *a* house

- *A* can be used to mean "each."

Examples: *I paid twenty dollars a pair for my shoes.*
The mail carrier delivers to the office twice a day.
My class meets three days a week.

- Use *an* before words in which the first **sound** is a vowel.

Examples: *an* academy *an* element *an* idea *an* untruth *an* owl

- *An* is also used before words beginning with a **silent h**.

Examples: *an* hour *an* heir *an* honest man *an* herb

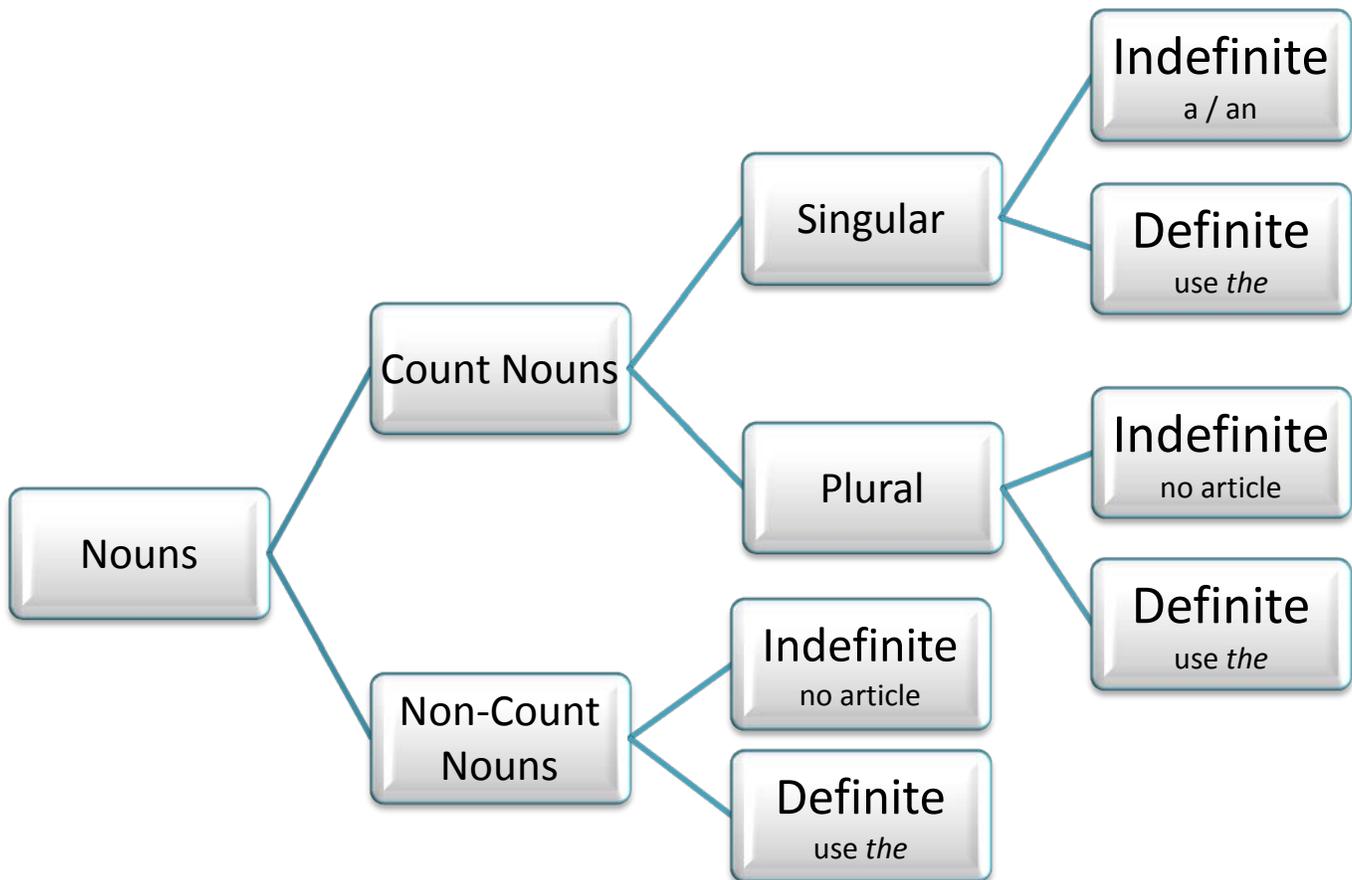
- *An* may be used before words beginning with a **sounded h** when such words are accented on the second or succeeding syllables.

Examples: *an* his-to'-ri-an *an* hy-per'-bo-le *an* hy-ster'-i-cal child

Note: Sometimes two adjectives connected by **and** are used to modify two nouns, one of which is not expressed. In such cases it is necessary to repeat the articles. (Example: The office has *a* maple and *a* walnut desk, meaning two separate desks--not *a* maple and walnut desk). Avoid inserting *a* or *an* after **of** in such expressions as **kind of pen** or **sort of thing**. (Example: What kind of house shall we buy? [not what kind of *a* house]).

Also, see ESL Workbook for Writers by Alice Maclin, Simon & Schuster, pg. 45-58.

THE ARTICLE CHART



ALL DEFINITE nouns (both count and non-count) – use *the*
SINGULAR INDEFINITE COUNT nouns – use *a* or *an*
All other INDEFINITE nouns (count and non-count) – no article