



Articles

Articles are an important, though often misunderstood, grammatical concept. To gain a proper understanding of articles, one must be acquainted with certain types of nouns: countable and uncountable.

Countable Nouns

A noun is considered countable if it can be quantified using numerals and expressed in both singular and plural forms. Most nouns fall into this category.

Ex: *There is **one chair** in the closet.*
*There are **four chairs** in the dining room.*

Uncountable Nouns

A noun is considered uncountable if it cannot be quantified using numerals nor be expressed in a regular plural form. Uncountable nouns can also be called “mass nouns” and typically require the use of quantifiers like “many” and “very” when quantity must be communicated. Many nouns that refer to emotions are uncountable.

Ex: *Dave is **very happy** in his new home.*
*Traci makes **a lot of money**.*

While most nouns fall strictly into one of the above categories (countable or uncountable), some can fall into either depending on usage.

Ex: *Tommy loves to drink **coffee**.*
*Tommy drank **two coffees** yesterday.*

Because the noun “coffee” can refer to the beverage in general or to an individual beverage, it can be either countable or uncountable depending on the context.

Articles with Common Nouns

Indefinite Article: **A or An** – used with nonspecific singular countable nouns

Shows class or group

Ex: *This is **a** textbook.*
*That is **an** apple.*

Note: Use “a” when the word following it begins with a consonant sound; use “an” when the word following it begins with a vowel sound.

Definite Article: **the** – used with specific countable or uncountable nouns

Identifies the noun

Ex: ***The** textbook is large.*

Identifies specifics of the noun

Ex: **The** history textbook is large.

Identifies object recognized by both reader and writer

Ex: **The** sun is hot.

Identifies the noun as one of a kind (with an adjective)

Ex: **The** best book is Gone With the Wind.

No Article – used with plural countable nouns and nonspecific uncountable nouns

Plural

Ex: *Books are useful.*

Uncountable

Ex: *Milk is rich in Vitamin D.*

Articles with Proper Nouns

Definite Article: the

Plural family names

Ex: **The** Smiths moved to Iowa.

States, cities, and universities introduced by a common noun

Ex: **The** city of Dallas

Oceans, rivers, mountains, and public buildings/landmarks

Ex: **The** Pacific Ocean
The Statue of Liberty

No Article

Singular names of people

Ex: *Jeff left work early.*

States, cities, and universities not introduced by a common noun

Ex: *Dallas Baptist University is on the right.*

Adapted from *Writing Clearly: An Editing Guide* by Janet Lane and Ellen Lange. (Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 1993).
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