

# INDEFINITE ARTICLES

## I. INDEFINITE ARTICLES - A & AN

**A** + words beginning with consonants

**AN** + words beginning with vowels (a, e, i, o, u, & silent h)

- a house
- a tree
- an uncle
- an apple
- a car
- a boat
- an engineer
- an idiot
- a pretty aunt
- a fancy dress
- an hour
- an expensive watch

## II. USAGE

A. Use **A** or **AN** before nouns that are **singular**, **countable**, and **indefinite**. Countable nouns are names of things that can be counted, & most have a definite size or shape

singular = one

countable = can be counted

indefinite = not specific, not previously mentioned or pointed out

- I ate **an** omelette for breakfast.
- Would you like **a** cookie? Yes, thank you!

B. Never use **A** or **AN** with plural nouns or non-countable nouns. The word **SOME** may be used instead.

- I ate **eggs** for breakfast. I ate **some** eggs for breakfast.
- I had **soup** for lunch. I had **some** soup for lunch.

C. Use **A** or **AN** when you mean **ONE**, but are not calling attention to the number

- Would you like **a** cookie, **an** apple, or **a** piece of cake?  
I'll have **an** apple, please.

D. USE **ONE** when you mean **only one** or wish to call attention to the number or contrast it with another number.

- Would you like **one** apple or two? **One** apple is fine.

E. Non-countable nouns identify things that have no definite size or shape. In order to express quantities of non-countable nouns, containers or units of measure must be used.

**a** gallon of milk

**a** block of ice

**a** slice of cheese

**an** inch of rain

**a** grain of salt

**a** cup of coffee

**a** box of cereal

**a** jar of jam

**a** bowl of ice cream

**a** pound of butter

**a** loaf of bread

**a** piece of chocolate

F. Some words can be either countable or non-countable, depending on their meaning in a sentence. When it countable, use **A** or **AN**. When it is non-countable, no article is used.

- I had **an egg** for breakfast. (a whole egg)
- I got **egg** on my shirt. (an indefinite amount)
  
- His **hair** is black. (all of it)
- There is **a hair** in my soup. (a single strand)
  
- Do you want **chicken**? (meat of a chicken)
- Do you want **a chicken**? (the whole bird)
  
- Mary had **a little lamb**. (a baby sheep)
- Sarah ate **lamb** for dinner (meat from a lamb)

G. Use **A & AN** with jobs & occupations.

- My father is **an engineer**.
- My mother is **a seamstress**.
- Carmen is **a very good cook**.
- I'm **a student** at CCSN.

H. Use **A & AN** in expressions of time or measurement.

- I work out at the gym **twice a week**.
- I visit my grandparents **once a year**.
- She earns **twenty dollars an hour**.
- He was speeding at **85 miles an hour**.
- Tomatoes cost **two dollars a pound**.

I. Use **A & AN** to introduce a noun when it is mentioned for the first time in a piece of writing, but **THE** is used in its subsequent usage.

- **An** awards ceremony at the Kremlin would not normally have attracted so much attention. However, when it leaked out that Russian President Putin would be presenting medals to three cosmonauts, interest in **the** ceremony intensified
  
- There is **a** robin in the tree outside my window. When my cat jumps up on the desk, **the** robin flies away.

J. USE **A & AN** in these common expressions.

all of <b>a</b> sudden	<b>a</b> great many	<b>a</b> great deal of
<b>a</b> couple of	<b>a</b> good many of	many <b>a</b>
<b>a</b> long time	<b>a</b> (good) number of	

- **All of a sudden**, we heard a loud bang.
- I went to Hawaii **a couple of** months ago.
- She hasn't been to the doctor in **a long time**.

- **A great many** people protested the president's speech.
- **Many a** foreign student has been confused by English grammar.

#### K. FEW vs. A FEW & LITTLE vs. A LITTLE

- Jack has **few** friends. He is often lonely. (not many, almost none)
- John has **a few** friends in New York. (several, 3, 4, 5)
- Joe had quite **a few** friends at his birthday party (many, an impressive number)
- Nancy has **little** money. She can't afford a vacation. (not much, not enough)
- Nicky has **a little** money. She's going to buy a car. (some, enough)

## DEFINITE ARTICLE **THE**

I. **THE** points out a **definite** person, place, thing, or idea, or one that has been mentioned before.

- **The** exercises in this book will help us learn **the** articles correctly.

II. Use **THE** when the listener or reader already knows which things you mean, or when there is only possible item you are referring to.

- I took **the** cat to **the** veterinarian. (my cat; the one I usually talk about) I took **a** cat to **a** veterinarian. (which cat? which veterinarian?)  
(the veterinarian I usually go to)

III. Use **THE** with things that are the only ones of their kind. (There may be others in the same class or category)

- **The** sun rose at 6:00 this morning. (the sun in our solar system)
- **The** world is full of opportunities. (our world)
- **The** theory of relativity was developed was developed by Albert Einstein.

#### IV. Non-Count Nouns

A. Use **THE** with non-count nouns that are **SPECIFIC**

- She admires **the** foliage.
- He fell into **the** water.
- **The** coffee in my cup was too hot to drink.
- **The** English he speaks is typically spoken in the South.

B. **THE** is **NOT** used with non-count nouns in the **GENERAL** sense

- Coffee is a popular drink.
- English is his native language.

## V. Geography

### A. Use **THE** before:

- names of rivers, oceans, and seas (the Nile, the Pacific)
- points on the globe (the Equator, the North Pole)
- geographical areas (the Middle East, the West)
- deserts, forests, gulfs, and peninsulas (the Sahara, the Persian Gulf, the Black Forest, the Iberian Peninsula)

### B. Do NOT use **THE** before:

- names of countries that are singular (Italy, Mexico, the US, the Netherlands)
- names of cities, towns, or states (Seoul, Manitoba, Miami)
- names of streets (Main Street, Washington Blvd., 5<sup>th</sup> Street)
- names of lakes and bays EXCEPT groups of lakes (Lake Mead, Green Bay, The Great Lakes)
- names of mountains EXCEPT mountain ranges (Mount Charleston, The Rockies)
- names of islands EXCEPT island chains (Maui, Key West, The Canary Islands, The Aleutians)

## VI. When something is outstanding, or excellent in comparison with others of its kind, we stress the word **THE** before it. In writing, we usually underline it or write it in italic letters. In speaking, it is stressed & pronounced [**thi**]

- Colleen gave **the** party of the year.

## VII. Use **THE** with superlatives (exception: do not use with the possessive)

- He's **the best mechanic** I've ever known.
- She bought **the most expensive ring** in the shop.
- It is **her most admired song**.

## OMISSION OF ARTICLES: Do NOT use articles with:

- Names of languages & nationalities
- Names of sports
- Names of academic subjects