ARTICLES

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

I. 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.
II. 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.