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.*
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