

Using Articles

There are four possibilities in English: the, a, an or no article.

'The' is known as the DEFINITE ARTICLE.

'A' and 'an' are INDEFINITE ARTICLES

No article is sometimes referred to as 'zero article'.

1. Most proper nouns can stand alone.

Bill Clinton, Joe, London, Australia, Marxism, Fascism

2. Proper nouns require 'the' when they are plural or refer to an institution or official organisation.

the Himalayas, the United States, the Philippines,
the Seychelles, the Cook Islands
the Australian Government, the Communist Party,
the Liberal Party, the Upper House, the National Bank

3. Use of 'a' before a proper noun is fairly unusual unless referring to nationality, religion, ethnicity or formal position in an institution or organisation.

an Australian, a Protestant, a Kurd, a General

4. Singular count nouns (i.e. nouns which have a plural form) usually require 'a', 'an' or 'the' or some other determiner.

a box/the box, a union/the union, an egg/the egg, a book/the book

5. Plural count nouns may require no article (zero article) or 'the'.

bottles/the bottles, experiments/the experiments

6. Non-count nouns (i.e. nouns which do not usually have a plural form) may require zero article or 'the'.

applause/the applause, research/the research,
publicity/the publicity, harm/the harm

Most non-count nouns can be used as count nouns in special circumstances. It is possible, but unusual, to encounter the following.

an oil/the oils, a behaviour/the behaviours,
a harm/the harms, a bread/the breads

7. Be careful of nouns used as adjectives.

a/the **furniture** truck, an/the **applause** meter

8. Use 'an' if the word immediately after the article begins with a, e, i, o or u, except where the u is pronounced 'you'.

a union/a university/ BUT an egg/an exciting trip/
a utensil an interesting result

9. Be careful when using 'most'. Compare the meanings of the following.

most gold/ the most gold/most of the gold
most cake/the most cake/most of a cake/most of the cake.
most research/the most research/most of the research