



Academic Writing Centre ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

ARTICLES

- An indefinite quality of a mass noun is known as the *partitive*. (some, any)

Definition: words that function like adjectives in that they both precede and describe nouns. Articles can be categorized as follows:

DEFINITE (*the*)

- used before singular and plural nouns to identify something specific
He chose **the** book on the shelf. [not just any, but a particular one]
- to indicate a general class or group (also known as ‘generic’)
The tiger is a ferocious beast. [tigers as a species – not a specific tiger]
- before ordinals and superlatives
the first off the plane, **the** last in line, **the** richest athlete
- to refer to someone or something previously mentioned
I saw a hockey game last night. **The** game was the best I’d ever seen.
- before bodies of water, groups of islands, and geographical regions
the Pacific Ocean, **the** Red Sea, **the** Bahamas, **the** Alps, **the** Equator

INDEFINITE (*a, an*)

- used before non-specific, singular, countable nouns
I found **a** wallet. [not a particular wallet]
- before nouns indicating membership in a group
He is **an** electrician/**a** Roman Catholic/**a** Russian
- before expressions of time and measurement
Andy Roddick’s serve has been recorded at 155 miles **an** hour.
- before a noun that refers to a whole class of objects/individuals
A dog is a loyal pet. [any individual dog]

ARTICLE OMITTED (Ø)

- names of countries (except the U.S., Netherlands), cities, streets, parks
Canada, China, Windsor, Beijing, Sunset Ave, Erie St, Jackson Park
- names of lakes, bays, islands (except groups of lakes or islands)
Lake Erie, Loch Ness, Hudson Bay, Walpole Island
- buildings and institutions, forms of transport, meals (all indefinite)
He goes to **church** on Sundays. She travels to work by **bus**.
- names of sports and academic subjects
hockey, soccer, cricket, physics, engineering, business administration
- plural nouns or non-countable nouns meaning ‘all’ or ‘in general’
Coffee is a popular hot drink. [**Not:** the coffee]

- In general, use “the” with all *specific* singular nouns. (singular, plural, and non-countable)
- Use “an” for nouns beginning with a *vowel sound*. (an apple, an elephant, an owl, an urn)
- Some things *cannot be counted*: liquids (milk, juice, tea), concepts, ideas, or other abstract nouns (love, truth, sadness, violence, research, equipment, mail, news).