

# Usage of Articles in English

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# Two articles

*The*

*A/an*

Definite

Indefinite

Specific / particular

Non-specific / Non-particular

Any nouns

Count nouns

Let's read *the* book

Let's read *a* book

# Indefinite article – *a/an*

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- ❖ My daughter really wants *a* dog for Christmas.
- ❖ Somebody call *a* policeman! (singular, non-particular)
- ❖ When I was at *the* zoo, I saw *an* elephant!
- ❖ I am *a* teacher. (group membership / profession)
- ❖ I need *a* bottle of water. (countable)
- ❖ ~~She wants *a* water.~~ (uncountable)
- ❖ He earns \$200 *a* day. (instead of *per*)

# A or An – spelling matters

*A*

Begin w. consonant [sound]

*a* boy, *a* car, *a* bike, *a* zoo, *a* user

Pronounced H

*a* horse

*a* TAU

*a* broken egg

*An*

Begin w. vowel

*an* elephant, *an* apple, *an* idiot,  
*an* umbrella

Silent H

*an* hour

*an* MSDS, *an* SOS

*an* unusual problem

# Definite article – *the*

specific	<i>The</i> dog that bit me ran away.
already known	I have two cars: <i>a</i> Ford and <i>an</i> Audi. <i>The</i> Ford is white and <i>the</i> Audi is silver.
common knowledge	Last week <i>a</i> fighter plane crashed into <i>a</i> field but <i>the</i> pilot managed to eject safely.
unique	It was <i>the</i> worst day of my life! The captain was <i>the</i> first person to leave the burning tanker.

# Definite article – *the* (2)

category	<i>The</i> computer has changed our lives.
musical instruments	Richard Clayderman plays <i>the</i> piano.
currencies	<i>The</i> U.S. dollar has risen against <i>the</i> yen but fallen against <i>the</i> euro.
entertainment / medium	In <i>the</i> daytime I listen to <i>the</i> radio, but in <i>the</i> evenings I like to watch television.

# Geo usage of *the* – don't

names of most countries / territories	Italy, Mexico, Bolivia but <i>the</i> Netherlands, <i>the</i> Dominican Republic, <i>the</i> Philippines, <i>the</i> United States
names of cities, towns, or states	Seoul, Manitoba, Miami
names of streets	Washington Blvd., Main St.
names of lakes and bays	Lake Titicaca, Lake Erie except with a group of lakes like <i>the</i> Great Lakes

# Geo usage of *the* – don't (2)

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names of  
mountains

Mount Everest, Mount Fuji

except with ranges of mountains like *the* Andes  
or *the* Rockies or unusual names like *the* Matterhorn

names of  
continents

Asia, Europe

names of  
islands

Easter Island, Maui, Key West

except with island chains like *the* Aleutians,  
*the* Hebrides, or *the* Canary Islands



# Geo usage of *the* – do

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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

# Count and noncount nouns

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- ❖ *The* can be used with noncount nouns:
  - ❖ "I love to sail over *the* water" (some specific body of water) or "I love to sail over water" (any water).
  - ❖ "He spilled *the* milk all over the floor" (some specific milk) or "He spilled milk all over the floor" (any milk).
- ❖ *A/an* can be used only with count nouns
  - ❖ I need *a* bottle of water.
  - ❖ I need *a* new glass of milk.

# Article omission

names of languages and nationalities	Chinese, English, Spanish, Russian but " <i>The</i> Spanish are known for their warm hospitality."
names of games / sports	volleyball, hockey, baseball
names of academic subjects	mathematics, biology, history, computer science
headlines	Iraqi Head Seeks Arms Stolen Painting Found by Tree
abstract nouns	Love is all you need.

# Additional info

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- ❖ <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/540/01/>
- ❖ <http://www.davidappleyard.com/english/articles.htm>
  - ❖ more usage of *the*
  - ❖ more omissions

*The* end

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