

Unit 12: ARTICLES

THE INDEFINITE ARTICLES

A and *an* are called indefinite articles. *Indefinite* means *not specific*. Use *a / an* when you are talking about a thing in general, not a specific thing.

Use *a / an* when talking about a thing which is new, unknown, or when you talk about that thing for the first time. Also use *a / an* when you are asking about the existence of something.

- I need a phone.
Not a specific phone, any phone
- Mark wants a video game.
Not a particular video game, a video game in general
- Do you have a driver's license?
In general
- I have a car.
We haven't talked about the car before.
- Tom is a teacher.
This is new information to the listener.
- Is there a dictionary in your backpack?
Asking about the existence (obstoj)

Remember that *a / an* means *one* or *a single*. You cannot use *a / an* with plural nouns.

- I saw bears in Yellowstone National Park.

In English, some nouns are considered uncountable such as: *information, air, advice, salt* and *fun*. We do not use *a / an* with these uncountable nouns.

- She gives good advice.

If there is an adjective or an adverb-adjective combination before the noun, *a / an* should agree with the first sound in the adjective or the adverb-adjective combination.

- He is an excellent teacher.
- I saw a beautiful eagle at the zoo.

THE ARTICLE A

A is used before singular, countable nouns which begin with consonant sounds.

- He is a teacher.
- She doesn't own a car.
- I saw a bear at the zoo.

Use *a* before words such as *European* or *university* which sound like they start with a consonant even if the first letter is a vowel.

Also use *a* before letters and numbers which sound like they begin with a consonant, such as *U, J, 1* or *9*.

Remember, it is the sound, not the spelling which is important. For example, *1* is spelled *O-N-E*; however, it is pronounced *won* like it starts with a *W*.

- She has a euro.
- That number is a 1.

THE ARTICLE AN

An is used before singular, countable nouns which begin with vowel (*a, e, i, o, u*) sounds.

- He is an actor.
- She didn't get an invitation.
- I saw an eagle at the zoo.

Use *an* before words such as *hour* which sound like they start with a vowel even if the first letter is a consonant.

Also use *an* before letters and numbers which sound like they begin with a vowel, such as *F* or *8*. Remember, it is the sound not the spelling which is important. For example, *F* is pronounced *eff* like it starts with an *E*.

- I only have an hour for lunch.
- Does his name begin with an F?

EXCEPTIONS

Some words such as *herb* or *hospital* are more complicated because they are pronounced differently in different English accents.

In most American accents, the *h* in *herb* is silent, so Americans usually say *an herb*. In many British accents, the *h* in *herb* is pronounced, so many British say *a herb*.

In some British accents, the *h* in *hospital* is silent, so some British will say *an hospital* instead of *a hospital*.

THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

The is called a definite article. *Definite* means *specific*. Use *the* when talking about something which is already known to the listener or which has been previously mentioned, introduced, or discussed.

- I have a cat. The cat is black.
- There is a book in my backpack. The book is very heavy.
- Do you know where I left the car keys?
The listener knows which specific car keys you are talking about.
- Do you own a car? Is the car blue?
You assume they do have a car after asking about it in the first sentence.
- Nobody lives on the Moon.
The Moon is known to everyone.

You can use **THE** with both singular nouns and plural nouns.

- I saw the bear in Yellowstone National Park.
- I saw the bears in Yellowstone National Park.

Many clauses and phrases make the noun known to the listener by telling the listener which person or thing we are talking about.

Let's look at an example sentence:

- Can you give me the book on the table?

We use *the* in this sentence because the phrase *on the table* tells the listener which book we are referring to. We are not talking about other books, we are talking about a specific book that the listener can see or already knows about.

- Did you read the book which I gave you?
- He didn't like the movie that you suggested.
- He loved the dessert with chocolate and cherries.
- The phone on my desk belongs to Ken.
- Did you know the man who was talking to Leonie?

HOWEVER: Not all clauses and phrases make the noun known to the listener. Some are simply descriptive. They add extra information, but they do not tell the listener which specific thing we are talking about.

- He bought the house with a big backyard.
This combination tells the listener which specific house he bought.
- He bought a house with a big backyard.
This combination tells the listener what kind of house he bought, but not the specific house he bought.

EXERCISES

- [Articles Exercise 1](#)
- [Articles Exercise 2](#)
- [Articles Exercise 3](#)
- [Articles Exercise 4](#)
- [Articles Exercise 5](#)
- [Articles Exercise 6](#)
- [Articles Exercise 7](#)
- [Articles Exercise 8](#)
- [Articles Exercise 9](#)
- [Articles Exercise 10](#)
- [Articles Exercise 11](#)