




ARTICLES



THE INDEFINITE ARTICLES

THE INDEFINITE ARTICLES A and AN

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*

The article 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.*

The article 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.*

Remember that A / AN means "one" or "a single". You cannot use A / AN with plural nouns.

- *I saw **a** bears in Yellowstone National Park. Not Correct*
- *I saw bears in Yellowstone National Park. Correct*

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 **a** good advice. Not Correct*
- *She gives good advice. Correct*

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** really beautiful eagle 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. Sounds like "yu-ro".*
- *That number is **a** "1". Sounds like "won".*

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. Sounds like "au-er".*
- *Does his name begin with **an** "F"? Sounds like "eff".*



THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

Adapted from: <http://www.englishpage.com/articles/a-vs-an.htm>

THE DEFINITE ARTICLE *THE*

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.

- *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. Correct*
- *I saw **the** bears in Yellowstone National Park. Correct*

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?*

DEFINITE OR INDEFINITE ARTICLE?

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.*

ZERO ARTICLE

No article is used to refer to:

- people or things in general
 - Life is hard.
- in some common phrases (places, travel, meals, time, games, etc.)
 - What do you want for dinner?