

## Articles "the, a, an"

### 1. The Indefinite Articles: a, an

The **indefinite article** has two forms. "A" is used before any word beginning with a consonant or a consonant sound.

|                       |
|-----------------------|
| a cat                 |
| a cucumber            |
| a crucial opportunity |
| a possibility         |
| a European            |

"An" is used before any word beginning with a vowel or vowel sound.

|                       |
|-----------------------|
| an aardvark           |
| an old goat           |
| an enemy              |
| an honourable retreat |

#### a.) Before an example

Use it before a singular, countable noun that is used as an example.

A dog requires careful training. [i.e., *any* or *all* dogs; notice that the word *training* is *not* countable]

A car must have safety equipment. [i.e., *any* or *all* cars; notice that the word *equipment* is *not* countable]

#### b.) Numbers

Use it with *some* numbers.

I won a thousand dollars. [Note: "I won *one* thousand dollars" is also correct]

There were more than a hundred birds on the island.

**c.) Before a singular, countable noun**

Use it before a singular, countable noun when it is first mentioned and before it is particularized -- that is, when it signifies a class of object rather than a particular object.

|   |
|---|
| I bought <i>a</i> license.                                      |
| He ate <i>an</i> apple.   |
| I have never visited <i>a</i> museum. [i.e., <i>any</i> museum] |

**d.) A general class**

Use it with a noun complement indicating a general class.

|                                     |
|-------------------------------------|
| He was <i>a</i> student.            |
| The truck is <i>a</i> Ford.         |
| My mother was <i>an</i> accountant. |

**e.) Expressions of quantity**

Use it in expressions of quantity (with nouns of mass but also with counting nouns).

|   |
|---|
| Microsoft has made <i>a lot of</i> money. [ <i>a lot of</i> is sometimes considered <i>informal diction</i> ]                   |
| They found <i>a mound of</i> earth.   |
| I played <i>a pair of</i> aces. [although <i>pair</i> means <i>two</i> , it is preceded by <i>a</i> and followed by <i>of</i> ] |

**f.) Units**

Use it to introduce units in expressions of quantity.

|  |
|--|
| The flour costs eighty cents <i>a</i> kilogram. [Note: <i>per</i> is also used in expressions of quantity] |
| The bus left the road travelling at one hundred kilometers <i>an</i> hour!                                 |

**2. The Definite Article**

*The* has only one form. Use the definite article on five occasions.

**a.) Unique objects**

Use it to refer to a unique object.

|  |
|--|
| <i>The</i> sky is falling!   |
| <i>The</i> Internet has changed my life. [There is only one sky and one Internet.] |

### b.) Second reference

Use it for a second reference to a noun that has become definite through the first reference.

We cooked a chicken for dinner last night; *the* chicken was very tough.

Yesterday we bought a new computer; *the* computer would not start this morning.

### c.) Modifier

Use it before a noun defined by a modifying phrase or clause.

*The* man with one red shoe came to dinner.

*The* house where I was born has been torn down.

### d.) Context

Use it before a noun localized by context.

I went out to play in *the* yard. [i.e., of the house being discussed]

We signed *the* papers to conclude the agreement. [i.e., those pertaining to the agreement]

### e.) Other uses

Use it before superlatives, before ordinal numbers such as *first*, and before limiters such as *only*.

This has been *the* best day I can remember.

That weekend, he went on *the* first camping trip of his life.

That is *the* only career for me.