



ESL -1

Articles in English

 The words **a**, **an**, and **the** are called articles. In English, readers usually expect to see one of those words before a noun (person, place, or thing).


 Definite article: **the**

Writers use **the** when they are talking about a specific noun, called a *definite noun*. Here, the word **the** tells us that the writer is talking about a specific store.

✓ the store

The can be used with both singular and plural nouns.

✓ the stores

 Indefinite articles: **a**, **an**

Writers use **a** and **an** when they are talking about a noun that is *not* specific (an *indefinite noun*).

Use **a** for nouns that begin with a consonant.

Here, the word **a** tells us that the writer could be talking about *any* store.

✓ a store

Use **an** for nouns that begin with a vowel.

✓ an apple

Also use **an** for nouns that have a descriptive word in front of them if that word begins with a vowel.

✓ an electronics store

A and **an** have the same meaning as the number **one**. Because of this, they are only used for singular nouns, not plural.

✗ a stores

✗ an apples

Continued →

Instead of using **a** or **an** for plural indefinite nouns, a writer uses no article at all. Here, the writer could be talking about *any* group of stores or apples.

✓ stores

✓ apples

👉 Some nouns stand for things that can't be counted, so it would be incorrect to use **a** or **and** for those nouns.

✗ a happiness

✗ an air

For nouns that cannot be counted, it is okay to use no article at all. Sometimes it is also okay to use **the**.

✓ happiness ✓ the happiness

✓ air ✓ the air

👉 When a writer does not make a noun plural *or* give it an article, this creates a problem for the reader.

✗ Max had idea.

👉 Does the writer mean that Max had one idea or more than one? It is impossible to know. Instead, the sentence should look like one of these:

✓ Max had an idea.

✓ Max had the idea.

✓ Max had ideas.

👉 Some proper nouns do not need articles at all.

✓ Huntsville, TX

✓ Sam Houston State University

These nouns do not need articles because there is only one of them in the whole world.

Note: Writers say **The United States** instead of just **United States** because here, the word **The** is not just an article. It is part of the name of the country.