A, an, and the precede nouns (person, place, or thing). The choice between “a,” “an,” and “the” is determined by the word that follows.

**A/An**

Use a or an when there is more than one common noun.

Example:

Sue rented a car for the trip.

Use the article an before a vowel (a, e, i, o, u) or vowel sound in the English

Examples:

- an eggplant
- an office
- an hour

**The**

Use the when the reader knows the specific identity of the noun. This can be clear to the reader for one of several reasons:

**The noun has been previously mentioned.**

Example:

A car loaded with dynamite cut in front of our van. When the car skidded a few seconds later, we almost hit it.

**The writer is referring to one specific object.**

Example:

Lee asked for the book on the top shelf.
A superlative such as “best” or “most intelligent” identifies a specific noun.

Example:

She is the best reader in her kindergarten class.

The noun is a unique person, place, or thing.

Examples:

The Statue of Liberty is located in New York City.
I’m taking my vacation to the Grand Canyon.

When Not to Use Articles

Do not use a or an with noncount nouns. Noncount nouns represent mass substances or abstractions that cannot be counted.

Examples:

Wrong: The air is necessary to live. Right: Air is necessary to live.

Some Common Noncount Nouns

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<td>soda</td>
<td>snow</td>
<td>love</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Do not use articles in concise writing such as recipes, telegrams, or prescriptions.

Examples:

Wrong: Add a ¾ cup to the mix. Right: Add ¾ cup sugar to the mix.