



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

Foods and Drinks	Nonfood Substances	Abstract Nouns
bacon	cement	advice
beer	coal	anger
cabbage	dirt	confidence
candy	gold	employment
chocolate	paper	fun
fish	plaster	health
ice cream	plastic	honesty
pasta	rain	intelligence
salt	silver	intelligence
soda	snow	love

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

Examples:

Wrong: Add a $\frac{3}{4}$ cup to the mix. **Right:** Add $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar to the mix.