



THE WRITING CENTER

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ARTICLES¹

What is an article? What does an article do?

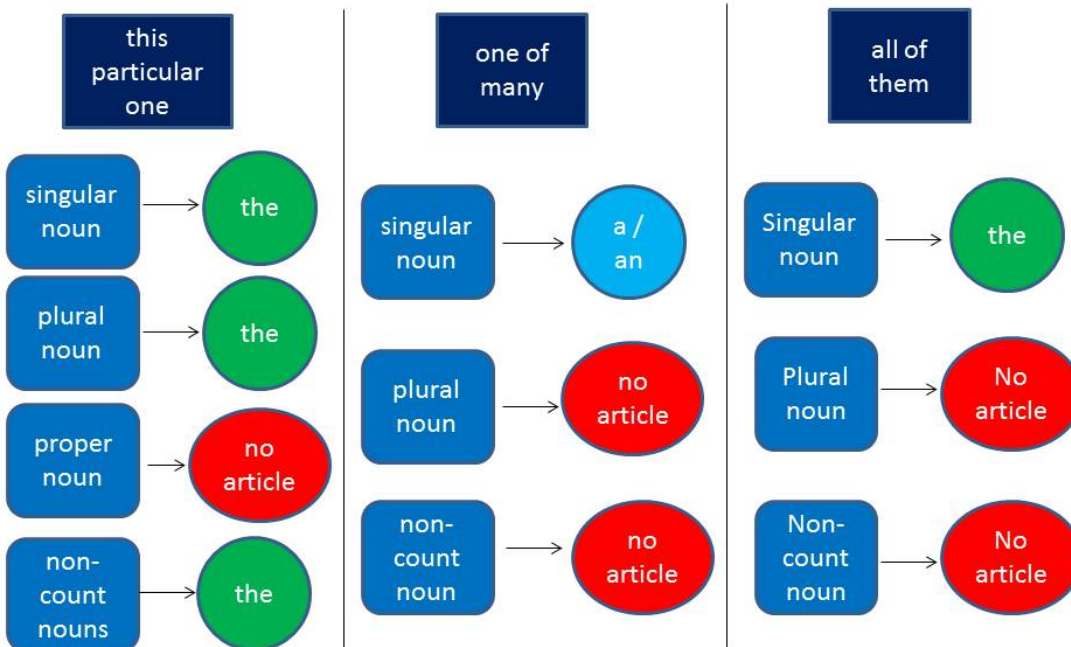
Articles are words that modify nouns. They provide information about the noun they precede. It indicates to the reader whether the noun which it follows is:

- A specific object, person, etc.
- One of many (of its kind)
- All of them, everywhere

Basic Rule

1. Any time a noun is used, the writer is indicating one of the following:
 - a. This particular one (the or no article is used)
 - b. One of many (a/an or no article is used)
 - c. All of them, everywhere: (the or no article is used)

Article Chart



¹ Adapted from the Writing Center at UNC at Chapel Hill's handout on articles



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1a. This particular one (definite article)

When the noun is a specific object, use either “the” or no article, depending on the context of the noun and whether it has special rules.

Singular nouns – “The”

The boy kicked the ball.

By this point in the term, the students should have a firm grasp of what natural selection is and how it works.

Plural nouns – “The”

The dolphins swam alongside the boat.

The authors note that new archaeology has placed too much emphasis on reconstructing past cultures using a social evolutionary perspective, which is too rigid to explain human behavior.

Proper nouns – no article is used

Jessica went shopping at Target.

Bain (2004) notes that Paul Baker of Trinity University used a successful ‘integrations method’ that proved successful for students who others had thought to be inept.

Non-count nouns² – “The”

The weather is beautiful today.

In his article, “Natural Selection, Scale, and Cultural Evolution,” Dunnell (1978) explains the great advantage the use of a biological evolutionary model would provide for archaeological research.

1b. One of many (indefinite article)

When the noun being used is one of many (of its kind), but not a particular object, then either “a,” “an,” or no article is used, depending on the context of the noun and whether it has special rules.

Singular – a or an

A cat would make a good companion for Grandma.

This article includes a graph that clearly and explicitly shows the differences between behavioral ecology, evolutionary psychology, and a dual inheritance model.

Plural – no article is used

Brownie sundaes will be served for dessert.

Certain behaviors, in some circumstances, are just as subject to the processes of natural selection as are other traits, such as skin color or limb length.

Non-count² – no article is used

Drinking a lot of water is recommended during a heat wave.

Violence and warfare are not simply sociocultural actions but are in fact evolutionary strategies for reproductive success.

Note: the *pronunciation* of the first sound of the noun will determine whether a or an should be used. A is used with nouns that start with a consonant sound, and an is used with nouns that start with a vowel sound.

Mark bought a house.

Jake attended a university in the Midwest.

Celia petted an otter.

Michael earned an MBA at Harvard University.

Sometimes consonants are silent, such as the h in hour, and when that is the case, an is used instead of *a*.

Erica spent an hour in a historical museum.

² See **Additional Information about Articles** (page 3) to learn more about non-count nouns



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1c. All of them (in the world)

When the noun being used is referring to all of them, everywhere, then either the or no article is used, depending on the context of the noun and whether it has special rules.

Singular – the

The blue whale is the largest whale in the world.

The television revolutionized how news was disseminated in the 20th century.

The Maya developed and used a complex writing system for centuries that has enabled researchers to not only garner information about rulers and political events but also to learn about the social structure, religion, technological advances, and power dynamics at play in Maya society.

Plural – no article is used

Earthquakes occur along fault lines.

Bonobos share 98% of their DNA with humans.

East European writers were, through their writings, attempting to discover and form their social identities in both local and global contexts.

Non-count – no article is used

Liquids are measured by the gallon in the United States.

Money is a necessity when one goes shopping.

Evidence for interpersonal and institutional violence is globally ubiquitous; a great deal of anthropological and ethno-historical literature exists which describes evidence of conflict and violence throughout time.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT ARTICLES

Countable vs. non-count nouns

Can the noun be counted?

A and an are used if the noun in question can be counted.

She bought a cookie.

I ate a piece of cake.

They saw an eagle.

The is used when the noun cannot be counted.

I bought the milk.

I ate the soup.

We saw the juice spill.



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Geographical uses of the

Do use the before:

Names of rivers, oceans, and seas

The Nile, the Pacific, the Sea of Japan

Points on the globe and geographical areas

The Equator, the North Pole, the North, the Middle East

Deserts, forests, gulfs, and peninsulas

The Sahara, the Persian Gulf, the Black Forest, the Iberian Peninsula

Do not use the before:

Names of countries, states, cities, or towns

Japan, Bolivia, Canada (except the Netherlands and the US), Cleveland, Paris

Names of streets

High St., Pacemont Rd.

Names of lakes and bays

Lake Huron, San Francisco Bay (except with a group of lakes, such as the Great Lakes)

Names of mountains

Mount Kilimanjaro, Mount Marcy (except with ranges of mountains, such as the Rockies)

Names of continents

North America, Asia

Names of islands

Hawaii, Aruba (except with island chains, such as the Aleutians, the Hebrides, or the Canary Islands)

First vs. Subsequent Mention

Is this the first time the noun has been mentioned in the piece of writing?

A or an is used to introduce a noun when it is mentioned for the first time in a piece of writing. The is used afterward each time you mention that same noun, as you are now referring to a specific, previously-mentioned noun.

I gave a presentation on how to make an apple pie to the home economics class. The presentation was a huge success.

Omission of Articles

Some nouns do not require an article. Some examples are:

Names of languages and nationalities

Chinese, English, Spanish, American, Esperanto

Names of sports

Volleyball, hockey, baseball, drag racing

Names of academic subjects

Mathematics, biology, history, computer science



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PRACTICE WITH ARTICLES

Section 1: Choose the appropriate article.

1. Krupal adopted _____ Alaskan Malamute.
 - a. a
 - b. an
 - c. the
 - d. no article is used
2. Diane went to _____ Sears to buy a new winter coat.
 - a. a
 - b. an
 - c. the
 - d. no article is used
3. It is illegal to drive the wrong way down _____ one way street.
 - a. a
 - b. an
 - c. the
 - d. no article is used
4. Michelle is going to _____ mountains this weekend.
 - a. a
 - b. an
 - c. the
 - d. no article is used
5. Nadia is wearing _____ orange sweater today.
 - a. a
 - b. an
 - c. the
 - d. no article is used
6. Marcus has an exam in his _____ organic chemistry class today.
 - a. a
 - b. an
 - c. the
 - d. no article is used
7. Don't forget to turn off _____ television before you go to bed.
 - a. a
 - b. an
 - c. the
 - d. no article is used



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Section 2: Insert the appropriate article.
(or use an X to indicate no article is necessary)

1. I am going to buy _____ chocolate cake for Sally's party.
2. William bought Kate _____ sweater she wanted for her birthday.
3. The handbag that Chelsea is carrying is _____ original made by a famous designer.
4. Abby is learning to speak _____ Arabic.
5. Dickie wants to travel to every state in _____ United States.
6. In order to earn a college degree, you must take classes at _____ university.
7. _____ lions live in groups called prides.
8. Joey had _____ inner ear infection last week.
9. The city of Macapa in Brazil is located directly on _____ equator.
10. Katie asked a salesperson at the boutique for help picking out a gift for her cousin. When she checked out, _____ salesperson gave Katie a discount on her purchase.