

## Articles

*A*, *an*, and *the* are articles placed before a noun and any modifiers that refer to that noun. This handout is meant to be an overview on articles. For further information, check out the web links and sources at the bottom of the handout.

### A/An

*A* and *an* are called indefinite articles. This means that these articles are used for general reference and refer to non-specific things or people. They are also used in front of countable nouns (a department or an experiment). *A/an* never comes before a plural noun (i.e. a books).

*A* and *an* are often used to introduce something/someone for the first time:

E.g. A doctor developed *a* vaccine for Ebola.

*An* is generally used in front of nouns that start with vowels (a, e, i, o, or u) or words with silent h's.

E.g. “*An* event”, “*an* hour ago” (but “*a* house fire”)

**Exceptions:** Use *a* in front of nouns that have a consonant sound.

E.g. “*a* university” (university starts with a consonant ‘y’ sound so *a* is used). If unsure, try pronouncing the word first to see whether it requires *a* or *an*.

### The

*The* is called a definite article as it refers to something or someone specific. *The* is also used to refer to something special or unique.

Examples:

- Certain celestial bodies (the earth, the sun, the moon)
- Political titles (The President of the United States)
- Countries that are pluralized or a collection (The United Kingdom)
- Some landmarks (The CN Tower, The Great Pyramid)\*
- Specific decades or centuries (The 1920's, the 1800's)

*The* is also used to talk about something that was introduced previously.

E.g. *The* doctor who developed *the* vaccine for Ebola receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

### No Articles

In some situations articles are not necessary.

- Most countries and cities (Canada, Mexico, Toronto)
- All proper nouns (Brian, Susanne, Lake Superior)
- Abstract concepts (education, intelligence)
- Food and drinks (rice, beer)
- Emotions (courage, happiness)
- Plural nouns (men, women, sailors)
- Fields of study (Business, Science, International Development)

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## Articles

- Specific years (1985, 1867)

### Exceptions

1. If the sentence contains a prepositional phrase then it is necessary to use *the* in front of abstract concepts and emotions.

E.g. Happiness is the key to success. (does not contain a prepositional phrase)  
The happiness of family life is the key to success. (does contain a prepositional phrase).

2. If a sentence has food or drink in it contains information on where it came from or whom it belongs to then *the* is required.

E.g. Cheese is quite popular. (Non-specific cheese)  
The cheese that was made in Nova Scotia is quite popular. (Specific cheese from a specific place)  
The cheese is in his fridge. (Specific cheese belonging to someone)

**Practice.** Decide whether the following sentences require **a/an/the** or **no article**.

1. Many ancients believed that \_\_\_Sun revolved around\_\_\_ Earth.
2. Simone has\_\_\_ degree in\_\_\_ international development and\_\_\_ certificate in\_\_\_ linguistics.
3. \_\_\_experiment was monitored for\_\_\_ hour.
4. Saint Mary's is \_\_\_university located in the heart of \_\_\_Halifax.
5. \_\_\_undergraduate degree is necessary before you can apply for\_\_\_ master's program.
6. \_\_\_Canada will have its next federal election sometimes in\_\_\_ 2015.

### Answers.

1. Many ancients believed that **the** Sun revolved around **the** Earth.
2. Simone has **a** degree in international development and **a** certificate in linguistics.
3. **An** experiment was monitored for **an** hour.
4. Saint Mary's is **a** university located in the heart of Halifax.
5. **An** undergraduate degree is necessary before you can apply for **a** master's program.
6. Canada will have its next federal election sometimes in 2015.