

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

Which Article to Use

Definite article: **the**

Writers use **the** when they are talking about a specific noun, called a *definite noun*.

the store

Here, the word **the** tells us that the writer is talking about a specific 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.

a store

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

Use **an** for nouns or noun phrases that begin with a vowel or vowel sound.

an apple

an electronics store

A and **an** are only used for singular nouns, not plural.

a stores

an apples

Instead of using **a** or **an** for plural indefinite nouns, a writa


The Importance of Articles


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

X 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 the idea.


 Max had an idea.


 Max had ideas.

Singular Nouns that Never Need Articles

Some proper nouns do not need articles at all.

 Huntsville, TX

 Sam Houston State University

 President Bob

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.