MAKING SENSE OF ARTICLES

Articles (the and a/an) come before nouns to indicate whether they are singular, plural, specific, or general. In some cases, a noun requires no article.

Using the Definite Article the

The comes before singular or plural nouns whose identity is clear to the reader.

Use the when:

1. the noun is unique.
   e.g., the Earth, the Internet, the automotive industry, the sky

2. your reader already knows which noun you are talking about because you have just mentioned it.
   e.g., I witnessed an accident yesterday. The accident involved a bus and a car.

3. you have provided information to let your reader know that you are talking about one specific noun.
   e.g., The book that I need to buy for Statistics 369 costs $95.

4. the context of a situation makes it clear what noun you mean.
   e.g., My cellphone broke when it fell on the sidewalk.

5. you are referring to a class as a whole (especially animals, musical instruments, and inventions).
   e.g., The computer is a transformative invention that has changed our primary methods of communication.

6. you are using superlative adjectives.
   e.g., Mary received the highest mark in the class.

Using the Indefinite Article a/an

A or an come before singular nouns used generally or indefinitely (they could refer to any single member of a group).

Use a or an:

1. before singular count nouns used in a non-specific way.
   e.g., I want to go to the bookstore to buy a new magazine.
Situations that Require No Article

1. when you mean *all* or *in general* (especially when the noun is plural).
   e.g., Politicians frequently mislead voters.

2. when describing a concept or idea.
   e.g., Religion is a guiding principle in her life.

3. before non-count nouns.
   e.g., The recipe called for sugar, flour, and eggs.

Choosing Articles

**YES**
Use *the*

**YES**
Use *the*

Does your audience already know which noun you are talking about because you have mentioned that noun already?

**YES**
Use *the*

Have you provided extra or specific information to let your audience know which or what kind of noun you are talking about?

**NO**
No article

Can you count the noun?

**YES**
Use *a* or *an*

**NO**
No article

Is the noun unique? Is it the only one in the world?

**YES**
Use *a* or *an*

**NO**
No article

Is the noun a concept or an idea?
(e.g., knowledge and religion)

**NO**
No article

Practice: Do these nouns need an article? If so, should it be specific or general?

1. ___ doctor was late for my appointment.
2. Many ___ birds migrate in the winter.
3. ___ love is all you need.
4. I already ate ___ apple today.