

UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER

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SSC - 245

Articles

Overview: In many ways, the choice of which article to use belongs to you, the writer. Using articles correctly can help signal to your reader whether you are referring to something specific or something non-specific.

Articles are similar to adjectives because they modify nouns. English has two articles: “**the**” and “**a/an**”. “**The**” is used to refer to specific nouns; “**a/an**” is for non-specific nouns. Therefore, we call “**the**” the definite article and “**a/an**” the indefinite article. Remember to use “**a**” in front of nouns that start with a consonant sound, and “**an**” in front of nouns that start with a vowel sound.

Example 1

Definite article: Let’s go see *the* movie.

In this sentence, the speaker is talking about a specific movie. He or she wants to see Jurassic World, or the latest Avengers movie. Not just any movie.

Indefinite article: Let’s go see 21.94 ~~1.710 to 1.0 to 0.708~~ *a* mountain.

The “**a**” indicates that the speaker wants to climb a mountain, but it doesn’t matter which one.

Count and Non-Count Nouns

Non-count Nouns either use “*the*” or no article at all.

Non-count noun with “the”: I swam in *the* **water**.

The article could be removed from this sentence and it would still be grammatically correct, but it makes more sense with “*the*” since a specific body of water is being discussed.

Non-count noun with no article: My young niece hates **homework**.

The little girl hates homework in general, but since “homework” is non-count, even if she hated a specific kind of homework, we would say “math homework” or “history homework”, not “the homework”.

Count Nouns require an article or another sort of determiner (like a possessive pronoun).

Count noun with “a”: Please hand me *a* **bottle** of water.

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