

# Using Articles With Count & Noncount Nouns

This handout will help you understand and identify when to use articles to describe nouns.

## What does an article do?

An **article** describes how specific or general a noun is. There are only three articles: **a**, **an**, & **the**. Articles always come first in a list of adjectives describing the same noun.

## Questions to Consider:

Answering these questions about each noun will help you learn when to use articles and which articles to use:

- **Question 1:** Do I mean all of (noun) everywhere?
- **Question 2:** Do I mean one or some of many (noun)?
- **Question 3:** Do I mean this (noun) exactly?

## Count/Noncount Nouns:

Also when you are deciding whether or not to use an article to describe a noun, you need to differentiate between count and noncount nouns.

- **Count nouns:** If the noun can have a number in front of it (if it can be made plural) within the sentence's context, it is a count noun. **Count nouns usually need articles in front of them.** Some example of count nouns:

apple/apples cat/cats dog/dogs table/tables book/books  
pencil/pencils garden/gardens car/cars castle/castles  
dragon/dragons train/trains candy/candies cloud/clouds fish/fish  
star/stars bird/birds box/boxes candle/candles game/games  
week/weeks holiday/holidays job/jobs dream/dreams phone/phones  
computer/computers flag/flags cactus/cacti ox/oxen leaf/leaves  
man/men woman/women foot/feet tiger/tigers ball/balls

- **Noncount nouns:** If the noun cannot have a number in front of it (if it cannot be made plural) within the sentence's context, it is a noncount noun. **A non-count noun cannot be described by an article, unless you are referring to that noun exactly (if you are answering "yes" to question 3).** Some examples of non-count nouns:

- Sports games (tennis, golf, soccer, baseball, football, badminton, basketball, bocce, croquet, hockey)
- Natural substances (water, ice, fire, air, blood, honey, propane, gas, grass, dirt, mud, rain, snow)
- Certain foods of abstract quantity (bread, cereal, jam, cheese, sugar, flour, chicken, beef, pork, ham, bacon, seafood, pasta, ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, butter, pepper, ice cream soup)
- Liquids (milk, tea, wine, beer, coffee, lemonade)
- Abstract concepts and feelings (music, science, love, fear, anger, hope, peace, chaos, art, time, news, faith, work, weather, fun)

## Quick Guide

After determining the context of a noun in a sentence, use the this quick guide to determine if you need to use an article:

### Question 1: Do I mean all of (noun) everywhere?

- If it is a noncount noun, it should not have an article.
  - Bleach can be destructive to clothes.
- If it is a plural noun, it should not have an article.
  - My friend is allergic to bees.
- If it is a count noun, use the article “the.”
  - The tortoise can live for up to 100 years.

### Question 2: Do I mean one or some of many (noun)?

- If it is a noncount noun, it should not have an article.
  - I need some milk for my coffee.
- If it is a plural noun, it should not have an article.
  - Let’s have brownies for dessert.
- If it is a count noun, use the article “a” or “an” (an is for nouns that begin with a vowel (a, e, i, o, u).
  - May I have an apple to eat on the plane?

### Question 3: Do I mean this (noun) exactly?

- If it is a proper noun, it will *usually* not need an article.
  - My friend is from Saudi Arabia.
- If it is a noncount noun, use the article “the.”
  - The air is so humid today.
- If it is a plural noun, use the article “the.”
  - The flowers in your garden are so pretty.
- If it is a singular noun, use the article “the.”
  - I know the owner of the Italian restaurant.