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# When to Use Articles

## Write Site handout

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

It can be difficult to figure out if a noun needs an article to describe it, but answering these questions about each noun will help you learn when to use articles and which articles to use.

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

\*It is difficult to determine when to use an article to describe a noun because of the many different ways nouns can be referred to in the context of a sentence. Answering these three questions will help you identify the context of the noun, which will make it easier to determine whether or not to use an article to describe it.

When you are deciding whether or not to use an article to describe a noun, it is also important to understand the difference between count nouns and non-count nouns.

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**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.

**Non-count 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 non-count 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).

## Examples

**Do I mean all of \_\_ (noun) \_\_ everywhere?**

If it is a non-count 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 singular noun, use the article "the."

The water in our world today is the same water as 1,000 years ago.

**Do I mean one or some of many \_\_ (noun) \_\_?**

If it is a non-count noun, it should not have an article.

I need some new furniture.

If it is a plural noun, it should not have an article.

Let's have brownies for dessert.

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If it is a singular noun, use the article "a" or "an."

May I have a pen?

**Do I mean this \_\_ (noun) \_\_ exactly?**

If it is a proper noun, it will *usually* not have an article.

My friend is from Saudi Arabia.

If it is a non-count noun, use the article "the."  
The air is 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 this restaurant.





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