ARTICLES

What are articles? How do they function in sentences?

In English, we use two categories of articles to modify nouns:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Definite** | **Indefinite** |
| the | A or an |
| “Mom said that the car is in our parking spot.” | “Mom said that a car is in our driveway.” |
| In this case, Mom is referring to a specific car, most likely the car that belongs to them. | In this case, the use of the indefinite article implies either that we don’t know, or it doesn’t matter, which car or whose car is in our driveway. |

A or An?

If the next word begins with a vowel sound, use an. If it begins with a consonant sound, use a.

Ex. There is an open door in the house. OR There is a door in the house.

How do writers use articles?

Sometimes you may introduce a noun in a general sense and then refer to that noun specifically.

Ex. “You will need a screwdriver to replace the part. The screwdriver should have a flathead.”

This shows how you can move from referencing a noun generally to referencing a noun specifically because the noun had been previously mentioned.

Count Nouns and Articles

Count nouns do not need an indefinite article. You can distinguish between count and non-count nouns simply by thinking about whether you could put a number on that noun.

For example, if you were looking at a lake, you wouldn’t be able to say that there are “four hundred waters” in that lake. If you’re talking about a specific body of water, however, you would still use the definite article: “Look at the water in the lake.”

What instances are articles NOT needed?

* Proper nouns that refer to cities, streets, individuals, or languages. Ex. John, Chicago, Japanese
* Names of countries, unless the name is plural. Ex. Norway, The Netherlands, The United States
* A non-count noun when that noun refers to a thing in general. Ex. I like coffee (when you are talking about coffee in general). OR I like the coffee (when you are referring to the coffee you are drinking or to a specific brand’s or store’s coffee).
* A noun that refers to a generic non-count noun. Ex. Honesty is the best policy.