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A LESSON ON ENGLISH

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Articles

From <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/540/01/>

What is an article? Basically, an article is an adjective. Like adjectives, articles modify nouns.

English has two articles: **the** and **a/an**.

- **the** is used to refer to specific or particular nouns;
- **a/an** is used to modify non-specific or non-particular nouns.

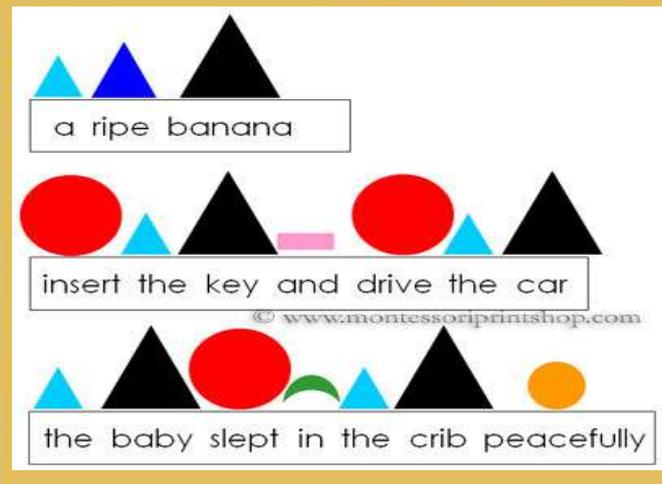
We call **the** the *definite* article and **a/an** the *indefinite* article.

For example, if I say, "Let's read **the** book," I mean a *specific* book. If I say, "Let's read **a** book," I mean *any* book rather than a specific book.

Here's another way to explain it:

The is used to refer to a *specific* or *particular* member of a group. For example, "I just saw **the** most popular movie of the year." There are many movies, but only one particular movie is the most popular. Therefore, we use **the**.

A/an is used to refer to a *non-specific* or *non-particular* member of the group. For example, "I would like to go see **a** movie." Here, we're not talking about a *specific* movie. We're talking about *any* movie. There are many movies, and I want to see *any* movie. I don't have a specific one in mind.



the = definite article

a/an = indefinite article



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Using Articles with Count and Noncount Nouns

The can be used with noncount nouns, or the article can be omitted entirely.

- "I love to sail over **the** water" (some specific body of water) or "I love to sail over water" (any water).
- "He spilled **the** milk all over the floor" (some specific milk, perhaps the milk you bought earlier that day) or "He spilled milk all over the floor" (any milk).

A/an can be used only with count nouns.

- I need **a** bottle of water.
- I need **a** new glass of milk.
- I saw **an** owl today."
- Did you eat **an** orange?

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