

## Article Usages (*A, An, and The*)

### Indefinite Articles

The indefinite article *a* and *an* classify the singular nouns they precede. Use *a* before a consonant sound (a yard, a university). Use *an* before a vowel sound (an apple, an hour). Indefinite articles are used for classification (that is, to refer to a certain type or class) in the following common contexts.

- **With the first mention of a noun.** Use an indefinite article when you introduce a singular noun for the first time.

I bought **a** writing journal for my English class. It was not very expensive.

- **With the expletive *there*.** Use an indefinite article when you introduce a topic that contains a singular noun.

There is **a** good reason for using a journal to improve your English.

- **For generalization.** When you are referring to a singular noun in a general way, use an indefinite article.

A writing journal is **a** notebook in which you can write down ideas without about grammar.

- **If a noun is plural or it cannot be counted, then no article is needed.**

**Journals** are useful.

**Writing** is an important skill.

### Definite Articles

The definite article *the* can precede singular or plural nouns as well as noncount nouns. It is used for identification in the following contexts.

- **For subsequent mention.** Once a noun has been introduced use the definite article before it later in the same sentence.

I wrote about two of my favorite possessions—a guitar and flute. I received **the** guitar as a gift from my parents.

As subsequent mention does not always include exact repetition of a noun. However, the noun chosen must be close in meaning to a word or phrase in the previous clause or sentence.

The teacher **grades** us on the assignment, but **the grade** isn't based solely on grammatical correctness.

[The noun grade is close in meaning to the verb grades.]

•**For something that is unique.** When referring to something of which there is only one, use the definite article.

One teacher asked her students to write about **the** moon in their journals.

Other nouns like moon include universe, solar system, sun, earth, and sky. A noun may be considered unique as long as the audience will recognize the referent. For example, airport may be preceded by the when only one airport would come to mind in the specific context.

My friend wrote about her experience at **the** airport.

•**For an abstract class.** *The* is used with a noun that refers to a concept.

*The* anthology has become a mainstay in the composition classroom.

Material based on Hodges' Harbrace Handbook, 16th Ed., pages 10-11.

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For more assistance with apostrophes, or with any stage of the writing process, stop by The Writing Center or visit [www.writingcenter.txstate.edu](http://www.writingcenter.txstate.edu) to make an appointment.



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