Articles

Articles are the words A, AN, and THE. There are four distinct situations to use articles in your writing:

**Countable vs. Non-countable**

Use “a” or “an” before nouns that can be counted.

**Examples:**
- I wrote a letter this afternoon.
- I ate an apple for breakfast.
- I saw an elephant at the zoo.
- I went to a lecture yesterday.
- That is an unusual shirt.

**Definite vs. Indefinite**

“A” and “an” signal that the noun is indefinite. “The” signals that the noun in your sentence is definite and refers to a particular thing or idea.

**Examples:**
- A cat is a good companion for people.
- The cat in the picture is beautiful.
- Would you get me a book for my birthday?
- Would you get me the book my professor wrote?

**First vs. Subsequent Mention**

The first time you introduce a noun, use “a” or “an.” After that first mention, use “the.”

**Examples:**
- A meeting will be held on Thursday. The meeting will last an hour.
- A tutor is helpful when you’re writing a paper. The tutor can teach you how to proofread.
- A job can be fulfilling and rewarding. The job must be something you enjoy.

**Using "A" vs. "AN"**

“A” is used with consonant sounds. “An” is used with vowel sounds.

**Examples:**
- I need a dishtowel that is wet.
- You need to choose a university, soon.
- Jason ordered an appetizer for you.
- Becky graduated as an honors student.

**Omitting Articles**

Languages do not take an article. Examples: Chinese, Spanish, English
Sports do not take an article: Examples: volleyball, hockey, soccer
Academic subjects do not take an article. Examples: mathematics, history, biology, art
Many emotions do not take articles. Examples: love, happiness, grief, concern, anger
Article Check-Up

Fill in the blank with a, an, the, or X for no article.

1. Do you have _____ coat I could borrow?
2. Is that _____ banana you’re eating?
3. Do you have _____ orange?
4. _____ movie we saw was very good.
5. _____ good movie to see is The Way We Were.
6. Are you _____ English major?
7. I am _____ nursing major.
8. _____ best professor I ever had was her.
9. What is _____ reason you are late?
10. _____ good entrée to order here is the salmon. _____ entrée is inexpensive.
11. Do you speak _____ Spanish well?
12. Have you picked out _____ article for your research? _____ article I chose is long.
13. Is your favorite sport _____ soccer?
14. Have you ever seen _____ picture of _____ igloo?

Answers:
1. a  2. a  3. an  4. the  5. a  6. an  7. a  8. the  9. the  10. a, the  11. X  12. an, the  13. X  14. a, an