

## ARTICLE USAGE

The English language requires an article with almost all singular nouns. However, there are exceptions to this rule. DO NOT use an article with the following types of nouns:

- Proper nouns:** Henry, Princeton, Oklahoma City
- Non-count nouns:** (things that are not usually counted) such as food and drink items, nonfood substances, flour, air, luggage
- Abstract nouns:** advice, anger, beauty

**THE**—“The” is called the definite article. It is used with most singular (and plural) nouns when referring to a specific person(s) or thing(s).

- Singular:** the president, the woman, the car
- Plural:** the children, the goats, the dishes
- Exception:** do not use “the” with plural nouns that mean “all” or “in general” or with most proper nouns.

### Examples:

- Correct:** Dogs are common household pets.
- Incorrect:** The dogs are common household pets.
  
- Correct:** Yale is a well-known university.
- Incorrect:** The Yale is a well-known university.

**A or AN**—“A” or “An” are indefinite articles. They are used with singular nouns whose specific identity is not known to the reader.

**A**—“A” is used before a singular noun that begins with a consonant.

- Examples:** a dog, a cow, a person, a lamp
- Exception:** Some nouns begin with vowels (a,e,i,o,u), but sound like they begin with consonant: “A” is used with these words.
- Examples:** a unicorn (pronounced “yoo-nicorn,” a one-dollar bill (pronounced “won-dollar”)

**AN**—“An” is used before a singular noun that begins with a vowel.

- Examples:** an elephant, an igloo, an octagon
- Exception:** “An” is also used with a few singular nouns that begin with a consonant.
- Examples:** an herb, an honorarium (silent ‘h’), an X-ray technician (pronounced “ex-ray”).

There are many more exceptions to these guidelines. If you are in doubt, it is generally safer to use an article with a singular noun than to leave it out. Also, try reading the sentence aloud to yourself or to a friend. It is often easier to hear mistakes than to see them.

Reference: Hacker, D. (1996). Rules for writers (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Boston: Bedford Books.