

# Articles

## “Indefinite” Article – **a** or **an**

Use with a singular count noun that is not defined or known. It is often but not always the first mention of the particular noun, and it is often but not always a generality:

I go to **a** school.

*The school is not defined in any way.*

Note: Use **a** before a consonant sound and **an** before a vowel sound. Be careful when the noun begins with a silent consonant, such as “h,” as in “hour”: **an** hour.

## “Definite” Article – **the**

Use with any noun that is already known or that is defined within the sentence:

I go to **the** school.

*This refers to a specific school that the reader already knows.*

I go to **the** school down the street.

*The school is defined in the same sentence, by the restrictive modifier “down the street.”*

**The** sun rises.

*The sun is a unique object that is generally known by everyone.*

## “Zero” Article

With noncount nouns and plural count nouns used in generalizations, use no article:

Air is heavy.

*Since “air” cannot be counted, it is a noncount noun.*

Schools serve students.

*The number of “schools” and “students” could be counted, but in this example they are used as generalizations, i.e., they do not refer to specific schools or students.*

Note: “**The**” can be used with noncount nouns when they are specific. For instance, **The** air in this room.

“**A**” can never be used with noncount nouns.

For more information: Lunsford, Andrea A. The St. Martin’s Handbook. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Bedford St. Martin’s. Boston: 2003.