



ESL TROUBLE SPOTS—ARTICLES

THE ARTICLES *a*, *an*, AND *the*

The indefinite articles *a* and *an* and the definite article *the* signal that a noun is about to appear. The noun may follow the article immediately, or modifiers may intervene.

<u>article</u>	<u>noun</u>	<u>article</u>	<u>noun</u>	<u>article</u>	<u>noun</u>
a	sunset	an	incredible sunset	the	round table

USE *a* (or *an*) WITH SINGULAR COUNT NOUNS.

a is used before a consonant sound: *a banana, a tree, a picture, a hand, a kid.*

an is used before a vowel sound: *an eggplant, an hour, an uncle, an occasion.*

DO NOT USE *a* (or *an*) WITH NONCOUNT NOUNS.

A noncount noun refers to an entity or an abstract concept that cannot be counted: *sugar, gold, honesty, jewelry.* If you want to express an approximate amount, you can use a qualifier, such as the following: *a little salt, any homework, enough bread, less violence, more coffee, some news.*

USE *the* WITH MOST NOUNS WHOSE SPECIFIC IDENTITY IS KNOWN TO THE READER.

Incorrect: When truck skidded a few seconds later, we almost ran into it.

Correct: When *the* truck skidded a few seconds later, we almost ran into it.

Incorrect: Our petite daughter dated tallest boy in the class.

Correct: Our petite daughter dated *the* tallest boy in the class.

DO NOT USE *the* WITH PLURAL OR NONCOUNT NOUNS MEANING “ALL” OR “IN GENERAL”; DO NOT USE *the* WITH MOST SINGULAR PROPER NOUNS.

Incorrect: *The* fountains are an expensive element of landscape design.

Correct: Fountains are an expensive element of landscape design.

Incorrect: In some parts of the world, *the* rice is preferred to all other grains.

Correct: In some parts of the world, rice is preferred to all other grains.

Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Reference*. 4th ed. Boston: Bedford, 1999.