MCC Writing Center

Using Articles Correctly

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 might follow the article immediately, or modifiers might intervene.

<u>article noun</u>	article <u>noun</u>	<u>article</u> <u>noun</u>
a sunset	an exciting vacation	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. 4 th ed. Boston: Bedford, 1999.



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