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.



Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity Statement— Metropolitan Community College does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, marital status, age, disability or sexual orientation in admission or access to its programs and activities or in its treatment or hiring of employees.

Last Updated August 2014