

Definite and indefinite articles

Introduction



Mary is **a** scientist. She works at **the** University of Manchester.

Definition

We use articles before nouns to help define them.

Indefinite and definite articles

Indefinite article: **a** or **an**

I have **a** banana and **an** orange.

Definite article: **the**

The food at this restaurant is delicious.

Note

Sometimes an article is not necessary but we always need one with a singular **countable noun**.

Singular
countable nouns

Plural countable
nouns

Uncountable
nouns

a - for nouns that begin with a consonant	✓	✗	✗
an - for nouns that begin with a vowel sound	✓	✗	✗
the	✓	✓	✓

Indefinite article

a or an

we use **a**:

- before consonant sounds: **a** doctor, **a** mechanic, **a** dog, **a** big car, **a** happy person
- before vowels that sound like the consonant /j/: **a** university, **a** European person

we use **an**:

- before vowels: **an** architect, **an** umbrella, **an** easy exercise, **an** important meeting
- before 'h' when it is silent: **an** hour, **an** honourable person
- before consonants that sound like vowels: **an** FBI agent, **an** SNCF employee

Rules for 'a/an'	Examples
To define something	Tennis is a sport. Manchester is a city in England. A mule is an animal with long, furry ears.
To describe someone or something	She's a lovely person. He's an optimist. She's a good swimmer. It's a lovely day today. She lives in a big house.
To talk about jobs	He's a lawyer and his wife is an electrician.

When we mention something or someone for the first time	I have a dog and a cat. There's an angry man in reception! She has a new car.
When we mean one of many - it doesn't matter or we don't know which one	Can you open a window, please? She works in an office.

Definite article

We use **the** before singular and plural countable nouns and before uncountable nouns.

Rules for 'the'	Examples
When we talk about something specific - we know which one(s)	Where is he? He's in the bedroom. What is the name of your company? Here are the parts that you ordered. The children are on holiday this week. [the speaker's children]
When we talk about something previously mentioned	We have a cat and a dog. The cat is very old but the dog loves playing with the children.
When there is only one	Paris is the capital city of France. the sun the Queen of England
Countries which are plural or which include the kind of country in the name - kingdom, republic etc.	the UK the United States the Netherlands the Alps the Maldives
Regions and points on the globe	the Far East the Mid-West [U.S.] the North Manchester is a city in the north-west of England. the North Pole

Oceans, seas, rivers, forests, gulfs, peninsulas and deserts (but not lakes)	the Pacific the Irish Sea the Rhone the Sahara the Black Forest the Gulf of Mexico
When talking generally about the population of some countries	The Spanish start work later and finish later than other Europeans. The Japanese are often quiet during meetings.
A particular animal, machine, musical instrument etc.	The elephant lives in Africa and Asia. Do you play the piano ?
Buildings	the National Gallery the Louvre the Ritz Hotel the Opus Restaurant
Some organisations and institutions	the police the Army, the Navy, the Royal Air Force the BBC the Internet
Some expressions relating to position or time	on the top in the middle at the bottom on the left/right at the moment in the end at the beginning at the weekend in the morning/afternoon/evening

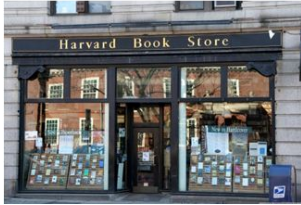
Examples



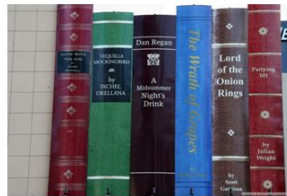
Can you open **a** window, please?



Can you close **the** window, please?



I need to buy **a** book.



The book I am looking for is by J. Wright.



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