

# 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.

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## 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

<b>a</b> - for nouns that begin with a consonant sound	✓	✗	✗
<b>an</b> - for nouns that begin with a vowel sound	✓	✗	✗
<b>the</b>	✓	✓	✓

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

When we mention something or someone for the first time	I have <b>a</b> dog and <b>a</b> cat. There's <b>an</b> angry man in reception! She has <b>a</b> new car.
When we mean one of many - it doesn't matter or we don't know which one	Can you open <b>a</b> window, please? She works in <b>an</b> 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 <b>the</b> bedroom. What is <b>the</b> name of your company? Here are <b>the</b> parts that you ordered. <b>The</b> children are on holiday this week. [the speaker's children]
When we talk about something previously mentioned	We have a cat and a dog. <b>The</b> cat is very old but <b>the</b> dog loves playing with <b>the</b> children.
When there is only one	Paris is <b>the</b> capital city of France. <b>the</b> sun <b>the</b> Queen of England
Countries which are plural or which include the kind of country in the name - kingdom, republic etc.	<b>the</b> UK <b>the</b> United States <b>the</b> Netherlands <b>the</b> Alps <b>the</b> Maldives
Regions and points on the globe	<b>the</b> Far East <b>the</b> Mid-West [U.S.] <b>the</b> North Manchester is a city in <b>the</b> north-west of England. <b>the</b> North Pole

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

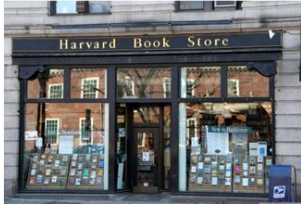
## Examples



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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