

## Using Articles (a, an, the) Correctly

Learning how to use these tiny words add professionalism and credibility to your work. Articles are “determiners,” words that identify and explain nouns. Determiners come before nouns and include articles (a, an, the), possessive forms (Jim’s, my), demonstrative pronouns or adjectives (this, that), quantifiers (none, some), and numbers (three, fifty). Proofread for articles by reading one sentence at a time and identifying nouns (people, places, or things). Then, ask yourself what you mean: Do I mean “all of them everywhere,” “one of many,” or “this one exactly?” Is another determiner best? Follow these steps:

1. Underline the nouns in one sentence at a time.
2. Ask yourself: Is it a non-count noun? Plural? Singular? Proper (a name)?
3. Ask yourself about the meaning: All? One kind? A specific one?
4. Reference the chart on page 3 to help you choose no article, a correct article, or another kind of determiner.

Look at the example sentence below. Then, underline the nouns in the other sentences and decide whether *a*, *an*, *the*, or no article is needed. Discuss your work with a Writing Center tutor.

1. In conclusion<sup>1</sup>, if the United States<sup>2</sup> wants to keep its position<sup>3</sup> as defender<sup>4</sup> of moral justice<sup>5</sup>, nation<sup>6</sup> needs to pay more serious attention<sup>7</sup> to the issues<sup>8</sup> of race-place inequalities<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Singular: This noun is part of a transitional expression.

<sup>2</sup> Proper: Use *the* in country names that begin with *United*.

<sup>3</sup> Singular: The possessive pronoun *its* is this noun’s determiner.

<sup>4</sup> Singular: “One of many” different defenders (other countries, groups) is meant here: a defender.

<sup>5</sup> Non-count: “All moral justice everywhere” is meant here, so no article is needed.

<sup>6</sup> Singular: “The United States exactly” is meant here: the nation.

<sup>7</sup> Singular (“attentions” can have a different meaning): The quantifier “more” is this noun’s determiner.

<sup>8</sup> Plural: “Race-place inequalities exactly” is meant here: the issues.

<sup>9</sup> Plural: “One of many” kinds of inequalities is meant here, so, no article is needed.

2. Immigration process has become major topic regarding development of urban landscape.
  
3. As a result, future generation will develop tolerant mindset and try to provide every citizen with fairness, equal education, and rights regardless of their race, ethnicity or skin color.

If you need more examples, check out these websites:

<http://www.grammar-quizzes.com/agree2a.html>

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/noncount.htm>

If you want to review specific rules, ask a Writing Center Tutor about *The Article Book*, by Tom Cole. We have a copy in the Center for anyone to use.

Use the chart below to help you select the correct article.

	<b>Do I mean “all of them everywhere”?</b>	<b>Do I mean “one of many?” or “one kind?”</b>	<b>Do I mean “this one exactly”?</b>
<b>Non-count nouns</b> (See list on p. 50 of <i>A Pocket Style Manual</i> )	<i>No article:</i> <u>Education</u> changes how people think.	<i>Use a/an:</i> <u>A good education</u> changes how people think. <i>(There are many possible kinds of education, such as “quality,” “poor,” “high school,” “college,” etc.)</i>	<i>Use the:</i> <u>The education</u> I received changed how I think.
<b>Plural nouns</b>	<i>No article:</i> <u>Volunteers</u> allow institutions to operate with less staff members.	<i>No article:</i> We need <u>volunteers</u> to help with community events. <i>(There are many possible kinds of people who could help; for example, we could also need “politicians,” “sponsors,” or “students.”)</i>	<i>Use the:</i> <u>The volunteers</u> in charge of fundraising are working hard.
<b>Singular nouns</b>	<i>Use the or a/an:</i> <u>The computer</u> gave more students access to information. <i>(“The computer” is the invention in general, not one machine.)</i> <u>A computer</u> gives students access to information. <i>(“A computer” represents one of all computers everywhere.)</i>	<i>Use a/an:</i> Bring <u>a computer</u> to your meeting. <i>(There are many possible kinds of objects to bring, such as a “laptop,” “tablet,” or “phone,” etc.)</i>	<i>Use the:</i> <u>The computer</u> donated by Ms. Banks increased our efficiency. <u>Apple Inc.</u> reinvented computers. <i>(No article for most proper nouns.)</i>