

## ARTICLES

are short words that point to a noun. *The* points to specific persons, places, and things. *A* and *an* do not point to something specific.

***The*** elephant charged the party of tourists. (A specific elephant charged.)

***An*** elephant is unpredictable (Any elephant is unpredictable.)

## MASTERING ARTICLES--NINE RULES FOR ESL STUDENTS

**Rule 1:** Use *a* or *an* for general reference. When you use *a* or *an*, you mean any item.

*Al owns a car.* [This is the same as saying **any** car.]

*Nina saw a dolphin.* [This is the same as saying **any** dolphin.]

Use *the* when you mean a single, specific person, place or thing. This unique person, place or thing may have been mentioned using *a* or *an* earlier in the writing.

*The car stalled.* [The refers to a **specific** car.]

*The dolphin jumped very high.* [The refers to a **specific** dolphin.]

**Rule 2:** Place *a* or *an* before singular nouns only.

<b>an</b> atom	atoms
<b>a</b> building	buildings
<b>a</b> cell	cells
<b>a</b> Canadian dollar	Canadian dollars
<b>an</b> Indian elephant	Indian elephants

Place <i>the</i> before singular or plural nouns.
<b>the</b> computer the computers
<b>the</b> disk drive the disk drives
<b>the</b> electric bill the electric bills

**NOTE:** In general, do not use an article before nouns that name religions, philosophies, intellectual or artistic movements, or nations.

**Not:** The Roman Catholicism

**But:** Roman Catholicism

**Rule 3:** Place *a* or *an* before nouns that can be counted. Don't use *a* or *an* before nouns that cannot be counted.

**Count**

The mountain climber used a tank of oxygen.

They marveled at the many cultural wonders of France.

Jason was a hero.

**Noncount**

Oxygen and hydrogen combine to form water.

They learned to speak French.

Jason had courage.

**Rule 4:** Use *a* before consonant sounds; use *an* before vowel sounds.

**Consonant:** *A thick green slime covered the bay.*

*Sajid bought a copier and a fax machine.*

**Vowel:** *She developed an aptitude for skiing.*

*Andre saw an octogenarian leading an animal that resembled an opossum.*

**CAUTION:** Words beginning with a silent *-h* actually begin with a vowel sound; they take *an*:

*an hour, an honor*

Some words beginning with *-un* take *a*:

*a university, a union, a unicycle*

**Rule 5:** If an adjective comes before a noun

- a. Place *a* before adjectives that begin with consonants.

*a disastrous error in judgement*

*a juvenile attempt to be funny*

- b. Place *an* before adjectives that begin with vowels.

*an elegant reception at the British consulate*

*an online course in English composition*

**Rule 6:** In most cases, don't use articles with abstract nouns, such as words that name attitudes, diseases, emotions, holidays, languages, philosophies, religions, sports, and studies.

*Henri loves art history.*

*There are laws against sexual harassment.*

*Marion had recovered from pneumonia.*

*Enzo's only vice is gluttony.*

*Our vacation ends on Labor Day.*

Paul studied **Sanskrit**.  
My friends follow **Buddhism**.  
Ernie believes excessive **pride** is a sin.

**Rule 8:** Don't use articles with these kinds of proper nouns:

- a. People, real or fictional

*Ms. Aarons, Superman*

- b. Countries, continents, states, provinces, cities, towns, islands  
*Chad, Asia, Minnesota, Ontario, Sardinia*

- c. Parks  
*Everglades National Park, Lincoln Park*

- d. Mountains  
*Mount Vesuvius, Mount Rainier*

- e. Lakes, ponds, other small bodies of water  
*Lake Victoria, Scudder's Basin*

- f. Names of specific political or religious leaders  
*President Ford, Pope John Paul II*

**Rule 9:** Use articles with these types of proper nouns:

- a. Regions of a country or of the world  
*the Far East, the West, the Arctic*

- b. Mountain ranges  
*the Cascade Mountains, the Caucasus*

- c. Groups of islands  
*the Shetland Islands, the Lipari Islands*

- d. Large bodies of water  
*the Bay of Bengal, the Caribbean Sea*

- e. Names of certain nations  
*the United States of America, the Netherlands, the People's Republic of China*

- f. Wars  
*the Russian Revolution, the Boxer Rebellion, the Second World War (But: World War II)*

- g. Buildings, canals, bridges  
*the White House, the Suez Canal, the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge*

- h. Official titles of political and religious leaders

*the president of the United States, the sultan of Brunei, the archbishop of Canterbury*

Sample Quiz questions:

1. Click the letter of the sentence that is correct. (Refer to Rule 1)
  - a. Did you ever own car?
  - b. Did he ever own a car?
  - c. Did she ever own a car?

Answer: b. Did he ever own a car?

2. Click the letter of the sentence that is correct. (Refer to Rule 2)
  - a. A good dinner in Tokyo, says my guidebook, costs about \$100.
  - b. The good dinner in Tokyo, says my guidebook, costs about \$100.
  - c. A good dinners in Tokyo, says my guidebook, cost about \$100.

Answer: a. A good dinner in Tokyo, says my guidebook, costs about \$100.

3. Click on the letter of the sentence that is correct. (Refer to Rule 3)
  - a. I don't like to ride in bus.
  - b. I don't like to ride in a traffic.
  - c. I'd prefer to ride a bicycle.

Answer: c. I'd prefer to ride a bicycle.

4. Click on the letter of the sentence that is correct. (Refer to Rule 4)
  - a. A pride is the chief of the seven deadly sins.
  - b. Pride is the chief of seven deadly sins.
  - c. Pride is the chief of the seven deadly sins.

Answer: c. Pride is the chief of the seven deadly sins.

5. Click on the letter of the sentence that is correct. (Refer to Rule 5)
  - a. I made a silly mistake on the test.
  - b. Number 3 was an hard question.
  - c. However, number 4 was a easy one.

Answer: a. I made a silly mistake on the test.

6. Click on the letter of the sentence that is correct. (Refer to Rule 6)
  - a. I love languages and I plan to study the French in the fall.
  - b. I love the languages and I plan to study French in the fall.
  - c. I love languages and I plan to study French in the fall.

Answer: c. I love languages and I plan to study French in the fall.

7. Click on the letter of the sentence that is correct. (Refer to Rule 7)
- a. The high school students usually like pizza.
  - b. High school students usually like pizza.
  - c. High school students usually like the pizza.

Answer: b High school students usually like pizza.

8. Click on the letter of the sentence that is correct. (Refer to Rule 8)
- a. Mount Everest is the tallest mountain in the Asia.
  - b. The Mount Everest is the tallest mountain in Asia.
  - c. Mount Everest is the tallest mountain in Asia.

Answer: c. Mount Everest is the tallest mountain in Asia.

9. Click on the letter of the sentence that is correct. (Refer to Rule 9)
- a. The Philippine Islands are found in the Pacific Ocean.
  - b. Philippine Islands are found in the Pacific Ocean.
  - c. The Philippine Islands are found in Pacific Ocean.

Answer: a. The Philippine Islands are found in the Pacific Ocean.