



## Articles

The words the, a, and an are called articles. Articles are adjectives because they are always used to modify nouns. Note that not all nouns require an article.

- ▶ Use the definite article the to indicate a specific singular or plural noun.

I ate the apple in my lunch.  
(not just any apple, but *that* one)

I ate the sandwiches in my lunch.  
(not just any sandwiches, but *those* ones)

- ▶ Use a definite article to indicate a class or kind of object by a singular noun.

The cat is a nocturnal animal.  
(This refers to the entire species, not just one specific cat.)

The guilty often go unpunished.  
(This refers to those who are guilty, not the adjective guilty.)

- ▶ Use a definite article before the names of rivers, oceans, and seas.

The Maitland River runs through Listowel.

The Atlantic Ocean contains many fish.

I like to swim in the Mediterranean Sea.

- ▶ Use a definite article for expressions of time that do not name a specific time, day, or month.

Birds sing in the morning.

Nicko likes to go for a walk in the afternoon.

Many people rake leaves in the fall.

- ▶ Use the indefinite articles, a and an, to indicate non-specific, singular, countable nouns.

I ate an apple. (no specific apple)  
I ate a sandwich. (no specific sandwich.)

- ▶ Use the indefinite article a before every word in which the first sound is a consonant, or before words beginning with the sound of *y* or *w*. The rule also applies to all words beginning with *eu* and many beginning with *u*. (Note that the initial sound is a consonant sound, not a vowel sound.)

a uniform    a university    a year    a eulogy    a wish

the *u* in uniform and university is pronounced as the consonant *y*.

- ▶ Use the indefinite article a before words beginning with *h* if the *h* sound is pronounced.

A history    a hundred dollars    a house

- ▶ Use the indefinite article a to mean “each”.

I paid eighty dollars a pair for my shoes.  
the mail is delivered twice a day.

- ▶ Use the indefinite article an before words in which the first sound is a vowel sound.

An academy    an element    an idea    an untruth    an owl

- ▶ Use the indefinite article an before words beginning with a silent *h*.

an hour    an heir    an honest man    an herb

- ▶ Use an article in front of both nouns used in the same sentence in order to make your meaning clear.

Unclear:    He sent a memo to the secretary and treasurer.  
(Are the secretary and the treasurer the same person?)

Clear:    He sent a memo to the secretary and to the treasurer.

Unclear:    The office has a maple and walnut desk.  
(Is the desk made of both maple and walnut?)

Clear:    The office has a maple desk and a walnut desk.

- No article is necessary before most proper nouns.

Shakespeare set “Hamlet” in Denmark.

Shakespeare:	a person
“Hamlet”:	a thing
Denmark:	a place

- No article is necessary before most non-specific plural nouns and non-specific *-ing* nouns.

Shoppers are usually interested in a bargain.  
(refers to shoppers in general)

Singing is a talent that not all of us have.  
(refers to singing in general)

### Practice Exercises

**A.** Indicate if the article the is needed in the examples below.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Ontario
- \_\_\_\_\_ Province of Ontario
- \_\_\_\_\_ Canada
- \_\_\_\_\_ Northwest Territories
- \_\_\_\_\_ Nunavut
- \_\_\_\_\_ London
- \_\_\_\_\_ City of London
- \_\_\_\_\_ University of Western Ontario
- \_\_\_\_\_ Fanshawe College
- \_\_\_\_\_ University Hospital
- \_\_\_\_\_ Great Lakes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Victoria Hospital
- \_\_\_\_\_ York University
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lake Erie
- \_\_\_\_\_ Thames River
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lawson Museum
- \_\_\_\_\_ Springbank Park
- \_\_\_\_\_ Southwestern Ontario
- \_\_\_\_\_ Parry Sound
- \_\_\_\_\_ Oxford Street
- \_\_\_\_\_ 401 Highway
- \_\_\_\_\_ City Hall
- \_\_\_\_\_ North Bay
- \_\_\_\_\_ Muskokas
- \_\_\_\_\_ Western Fair

**B.** Correct the article errors in the following sentences.<sup>1</sup>

1. Many students in the Physics have to study very hard.
2. She went to bookstore and bought pencils, textbook, and glue.
3. If students ride their bikes to school, they need to park them in proper spot.
4. At the night, all patrons must wear the shirts and the ties in the restaurant.
5. One of best recent inventions has been the computer.
6. If I have the problems with my car, I take the bus to work.
7. Be sure that you study night before exam.
8. Many students eat the Kraft Dinner.
9. When there is a full moon, I like to walk down the Dundas Street.
10. In California, the water is a precious commodity when there is drought.

**Answers**

**A.**

- |                                      |                                |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Ontario                           |                                |
| 2. The Province of Ontario           | refers to a specific province  |
| 3. Canada                            |                                |
| 4. The Northwest Territories         | refers to specific territories |
| 5. Nunavut                           |                                |
| 6. London                            |                                |
| 7. The City of London                | refers to a specific city      |
| 8. The University of Western Ontario | refers to specific lakes       |
| 9. Fanshawe College                  |                                |
| 10. University Hospital              |                                |
| 11. The Great Lakes                  | refers to specific lakes       |
| 12. Victoria Hospital                |                                |
| 13. York University                  |                                |
| 14. Lake Erie                        |                                |
| 15. The Thames River                 | refers to a specific river     |
| 16. The Lawson Museum                | refers to a specific museum    |

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Writing Clearly: An Editing Guide, p. 190.

- 17. Springbank Park
- 18. Southwestern Ontario
- 19. Parry Sound
- 20. Oxford Street
- 21. The 401 Highway                      refers to a specific highway
- 22. City Hall
- 23. North Bay
- 24. The Muskokas                      refers to a specific region in Canada
- 25. The Western Fair                      refers to a specific fair

**B.** Bolded articles in parentheses need to be deleted. Bolded articles not in parentheses need to be added.

1. Many students in **[the]** Physics have to study very hard.
2. She went to **the** bookstore and bought pencils, **a** textbook, and glue.
3. If students ride their bikes to school, they need to park them in **the** proper spot.
4. At **[the]** night, all patrons must wear **[the]** shirts and **[the]** ties in the restaurant.
5. One of **the** best recent inventions has been the computer.
6. If I have **[the]** problems with my car, I take the bus to work.
7. Be sure that you study **the** night before **the / an** exam.
8. Many students eat **[the]** Kraft Dinner.
9. When there is a full moon, I like to walk down **[the]** Dundas Street.
10. In California, **[the]** water is a precious commodity when there is **a** drought.

