Bracken Business Communications Clinic

GRAMMAR

DEFINITE and INDEFINITE ARTICLES: *the, a, an*

The English language uses articles to identify nouns. Articles act much like adjectives. Articles clarify whether a noun is specific or general, singular or plural. An article appears before the noun it accompanies.

There are two types of articles
- Definite article: *the*
- Indefinite article: *a, a.*

General rules
- Place the article before the noun.
  e.g., the house   the cat   a dog   a book

- Place the article <u>before</u> the adjective when the noun is modified by an adjective.
   e.g., the purple house   the black cat   a white dog   an open book < <u>Correct</u>
        the house purple or   a dog white < <u>Incorrect</u>

- Do <u>not</u> add an article when the noun has a possessive pronoun (*my, his, her, our, their*) or a demonstrative pronoun (*this, that*).
    e.g., my house   her book   that house   this book < <u>Correct</u>
          the my house or   the this book < <u>Incorrect</u>

DEFINITE ARTICLE: *the*

- Use *the* to identify specific or definite nouns: nouns that represent things, places, ideas, or persons that can be identified specifically.

- Use *the* with both singular and plural definite nouns.
    e.g., the house   the houses   the business   the businesses

- Use *the* to identify things, places, ideas, or persons that represent a specific or definite group or category.
    e.g., The students in Professor Smith's class should study harder.
        The automobile revolutionized travel and industry.
         (*the automobile* identifies a specific category of transportation)

INDEFINITE ARTICLE: *a* or *an*

- Use *a* or *an* to identify nouns that are <u>not</u> definite and <u>not</u> specific.
    - Think of *a* and *an* as meaning *any* or *one among many*.
    e.g., a book (any book) a dog (any dog)   a cat (one cat)   a house (one among many houses)

- Use *a* or *an* <u>only</u> for <u>singular</u> nouns.

- Do <u>not</u> use an article for a plural, indefinite noun.
    - Think of a plural, indefinite noun as meaning *all*.
    e.g., Students should study hard. (All students should study hard.)

When to use *a* and when to use *an*
- Choose when to use *a* or *an* according to <u>the sound of the noun that follows it</u>.
    o Use *a* before consonant sounds.
        e.g.,   a book   a dog

    o Use *a* before a sounded *h*, a long *u*, and *o* with the sound of *w*.
        e.g., a hat   a house   a union   a uniform   a one-hour appointment

    o Use *an* before vowel sounds (except long *u*).
        e.g., an asset   an essay   an index   an onion   an umbrella

    o Use *an* when *h* is <u>not</u> sounded.
        e.g., an honor   an hour

NOTE: Computerized grammar checkers do not indicate missing or misused articles. Therefore, you cannot depend on a computer grammar checker to alert you to missing or misused articles.