

Articles

The **definite article (the)** modifies a noun that describes a **particular** thing.

The **indefinite article (a or an)** modifies a noun that describes a **generality**.

Compare the following:

- **An** apple a day is good for your health. (general; any apple)
- **The** apple in my hand comes from Prince Edward County. (a particular apple)
- **A** degree or diploma is **a** formula for success. (general; there are many degrees and many formulas for success)
- **E = mc²** is **the** formula that made Einstein famous. (a particular formula)

The **definite article (the)**, meaning **only one**, modifies a noun that describes a particular person, place, or thing:

- Agnes Macphail was **the** first woman elected to **the** House of Commons of Canada. (There is only one woman who was first to be elected to it, and there is only one House of Commons of Canada).
- **The** sun is **the** centre of our solar system. (There is only one sun in our solar system, and the solar system has only one centre.)

The **indefinite article (a or an)**, meaning **one of many**, appears before a singular noun or adjective:

- She is **a** scientist.
- It is **a** difficult experiment.
- Life is **a** mystery.
- That is **a** revolutionary painting.

Idiomatically, “a” may also have the meaning of “one.” Note that we rarely use “one” to modify a singular noun; “a” is customary, e.g., There is **a** mosquito in this room.

No article precedes a **plural countable noun** or an **uncountable noun**. When an article does not precede a noun, as in the examples below, we refer to it as **zero (∅) article**:

- ∅ Elephants are highly social, intelligent beings.
- ∅ Economic inequality is an important subject to study.
- They are ∅ friends of mine.
- ∅ Music is diverse.
- ∅ Courage is essential for a good life.