

## **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, an*.

### **General rules**

- Place the article before the noun.  
e.g., the house the cat a dog a book
- Place the article before the adjective when the noun is modified by an adjective.  
e.g., the purple house the black cat a white dog an open book < Correct  
the house purple or a dog white < Incorrect
- Do not 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 < Correct  
the my house or the this book < Incorrect

### **DEFINITE ARTICLE: *the***

**The** (before a singular or plural noun)

- 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***

**A** (before a singular noun beginning with a consonant sound)

**An** (before a singular noun beginning with a vowel sound)

Count nouns - refers to items that can be counted and are either singular or plural

Non-count nouns - refers to items that are not counted and are always singular

- Use *a* or *an* to identify nouns that are not definite and not 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* only for singular nouns.

- Do not 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 the sound of the noun that follows it.
- Use *a* before consonant sounds.  
e.g., a book a dog .
- 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
- Use *an* before vowel sounds (except long *u*).  
e.g., an asset an essay an index an onion an umbrella
- Use *an* when *h* is not sounded.  
e.g., an honor an hour