ARTICLES
adapted from <u>Writing with Confidence</u> by Alan Meyer, Harper Collins, 1995

<u>A Summary of usage:</u>

There are two kinds of nouns in English:

1. countable nouns (you can put a number before them): *one day*, *three apples*, *five people*.
2. uncountable nouns (you cannot put a number before them): *water*, *music*, *honesty*, *luggage*.

When you are deciding whether to use *a/an* or *the* with singular, countable nouns:

1. use *a/an* when you mean *any one* or *one of many* (for example: *a* tree = *any* tree; *a* hair = *one* hair);
2. use *a/an* for identification (for example: "Tom is *a* barber.");
3. use *the* to point out a *specific* or *particular* one (for example: *the chair* in *the corner,* or *the pen* with *the missing cap*);
4. use *the* when you mean *the only one* (for example: *the floor, the second floor, the attic*).
5. use *the* to refer to nouns you have already mentioned (for example: "I found *a* photograph and *a* painting in the attic. *The* painting [now specified] apparently was based on *the* photograph.").

When you are deciding whether or not to use *the* in front of plural, uncountable, or capitalized nouns:

1. Before specific plurals, place *the* (for example: *the last three days, the lectures Professor Chin gave*);
2. Before plurals used in a general sense, place no article (for example: *many students, rock bands, prices*).
3. With uncountable nouns used in a general sense, use no article (for example: *religion, exercise, air*).
4. With capitalized nouns, use *the* for:
    i. country names that end in –*s* (*the* United States)
    ii. country names that contain *Republic* (*the* Republic of South Africa)
    iii. school names beginning with *College* or *University* (*the* University of Iowa)
    iv. river, ocean, or sea names (*the* Atlantic Ocean)
        <u>Note</u>: Do not place *the* before lake names (Lake Erie)

A more detailed explanation of *a/an* and *the* usage:

A/An

- **The article *a/an* means the same thing as the number *one*.** Therefore, you can use *a/an* only before a *singular countable noun.* *A/an* means "any one" or "one of many."

    Here are some examples of the use of *a/an*:

    Take *a* pencil (*any one* pencil; there are many choices).
    I just ate *an* apple (*one of many* possible apples).
    A robin built its nest in that tree (not a specific robin; it could be *any on* robin).

- **Use *a/an* for Identification.** In many languages, you could write "I am student" without the *a.* In English, you must include the *a*, since you mean, "I am *one of many* students."

    Here are some more sentences in which *a/an* identifies someone or something:

    He is *a lawyer.*
    It is *an adjective.*
    She is only *a* municipal *worker.*
    That was *a* funny *story.*

- **Use *a* Before Consonant Sounds, *an* Before Vowel Sounds.** The beginning sound—not the spelling—of a word determines whether you should use *a* or *an* before it.

    A goes before *consonant sounds*:

    a lesson   *a* shoe
    a chair   *a* doctor

    n goes before *vowel sounds* (for example, *an apple* is easier to pronounce than *a apple*):

    an elephant   *an* awful experience
    an enormous task   *an* overcharge

THE

- **Use *the* to Point to a Specific One.** Unlike *a,* which means "any one," *the* points out a *specific* one or a *particular* one.

    Here are some examples of the use of *the:*

    What is *the assignment for Wednesday?* (Specifies it and distinguishes it from other assignments, like those for Monday and Friday.)

The new Chevrolet that Linda bought is beautiful. (Specifies it and distinguishes it from other cars or Chevrolets.)
Let's eat *the apple pie.* (Specifies it and distinguishes it from other pies, like peach or cherry pies.)
The man standing over there asked to speak to the manager. (Specifies *man* and distinguishes him from others who may be present.)

- **Use *the* When You Mean the *Only* One.** Sometimes there is only one of something in a room, or in a house, or in the whole world. When you refer to that thing, you cannot use the article *a*, for *a* implies that something comes from a group containing more than one. Instead, you must use the article *the*.

  The roof of this house leaks. (The house has only one roof.)
  I want to buy carpeting for *the floor.* (There is only one floor.)
  What time does *the clock* say? (There is only one clock in the room.)
  The sky is cloudy today. (There is only one sky.)

- **Use *the* to Refer to Nouns You Have Already Mentioned.** Once you have mentioned a noun, you have specified which one you mean. When you mention it a second time, you should use *the* before it instead of *a*.

  Would you buy *a used car* from that man?
  Yes, but only *if the car* (now specified) had a five-year guarantee.
  You will find *a pair* of earrings and *a necklace* in my drawer. *The Necklace* (now specified) was my grandmother's.

When to use No Article

- **Use *the* Before <u>Specific</u> Plural Countable and <u>Specific</u> Uncountable Nouns; Use No Article Before <u>General</u> Plural Countable and <u>General</u> Uncountable Nouns.** As you know, you cannot place *a/an* before a plural noun. Therefore, when you use a plural noun, your choice is limited to *the* or no article at all. *The* makes the plural noun specific; no article makes the plural noun nonspecific, or general, in its meaning. Compare the following sets of sentences:

  The three birds on the windowsill (specific) are pigeons.
  vs.
  Birds (in general) are interesting animals.

  The people on my block (specific) are friendly.
  vs.
  People (in general) are attending college in larger numbers.

  The examinations this semester (specific) have been easier than the examinations last semester.

vs.

Examinations (in general) don't usually make me nervous.

- **If you use an *uncountable* noun in a general sense, you also do not use an article.**
  Compare these examples.

  The water in Lake Erie (specific) is polluted.
  but
  Water (in general) is plentiful.

  The fruit this season (specific) has been expensive.
  but
  Fruit (general) is good for you.

Some Additional Advice About A/An and The

- **Some Names Require *the*.**
  Use *the* before the names of the countries that end in –s or contain the word *Republic*.

  the United States (but just America)
  the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (but just Russia)
  the Netherlands (but just Holland)
  the British Isles (but just Great Britain)
  the People's Republic of China (but just China)
  Note this exception: *the* Soviet Union

  Use *the* before the names of rivers, oceans, and seas (but not lakes).

  the Nile River
  the Mediterranean Sea
  the Atlantic Ocean
  Lake Superior
  Exception: the Great Salt Lake

  Use *the* before the names of colleges and universities beginning with the words *College* or *University*.

the University of Illinois	Indiana University
the University of Southern California	Boston College
the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences	

BASIC ARTICLE USAGE

SINGULAR COUNT NOUN,	(a) A **banana is** yellow.*	A speaker uses generic nouns to make generalizations. A generic noun represents a whole class of things, it is not specific, real, concrete thing but rather a symbol of a whole group.
PLURAL COUNT NOUN	(b) 0 **Bananas** are yellow.	In (a) and (b); The speaker is talking about any and all fruit, fruit in general. Notice that no article (0) is used to make generalizations with plural count nouns and noncount nouns, as in (b) and (c).
NONCOUNT NOUN	(c) 0 Fruit is good for you.	

SINGULAR COUNT NOUN,	(d) I ate a **banana,**	Indefinite nouns are actual things (not symbols), but they are not specifically identified. In (d): The speaker is not referring to "this banana" or "that banana" or "that banana you gave me." The speaker is simply saying that she ate one banana. The listener does not know nor need to know which specific banana was eaten; it is simply one banana out of that whole group of things in this world called bananas
PLURAL COUNT NOUN	(e) I ate some **bananas.**	In (e) and (f); some is often used with indefinite Plural Count Nouns and indefinite noncount nouns. In addition to some, a speaker might use, *a few, several-a lot of, etc.*, with plural count nouns, or **a little, a lot of, etc.,** with noncount nouns.
NONCOUNT NOUN	(f) I ate some fruit.	

*III. USING THE: **DEFINITE** NOUNS*

SINGULAR COUNT NOUN,	(g) Thank you for *the banana.*	A noun is definite when both the speaker and the listener are thinking about the same specific thing. In (g): The speaker uses *the* because the listener knows which specific banana the speaker is talking about, i.e., that particular banana which the listener gave to the speaker.
PLURAL COUNT NOUN	(h) Thank you for *the banana.*	
NONCOUNT NOUN	(i) Thank you for *the fruit.*	Notice that *the* is used with both singular and plural count nouns and with noncount nouns.

Usually *a/an* is used with a singular generic count noun. Examples:
A window is made of glass. **A doctor** heals sick people. Parents must give **a child** love. **A box** has six sides. **An apple** can be red, green, or yellow.
The is sometimes used with a singular generic count noun (not a plural generic count noun, not a generic noncount noun). "Generic *the*" is commonly used with, in particular: (1) Species of animals: **The whale** is the largest mammal on earth
                                                                                     The elephant is the largest land mammal.*
                                         (2) inventions: Who invented **the telephone**? **The wheel**? **The refrigerator**? **The airplane**?
                                                                                     The computer will play an increasingly large role in all of our lives.
                                         (3) musical instruments: I would like to learn to play **the piano**.
                                                                                     Do you play **the guitar**?

D-2 GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR ARTICLE USAGE

(a) **The *sun is* bright today.** Please hand this book to ***the teacher***. Please open ***the door***. Jack is in ***the kitchen***.	GUIDELINE: Use ***the*** when you know or assume that your listener is familiar with and thinking about the same specific thing or person you are talking about.
(b) Yesterday I saw *some dogs*. ***The dogs*** were chasing a *cat*. ***The cat*** was chasing a *mouse*. ***The mouse*** ran into a *hole*. ***The hole*** was very small.	GUIDELINE: Use ***the*** for the second mention of an indefinite noun; in (b): first mention *some dogs*, *a cat, a mouse, a hole*. Second mention *the dogs, the cat, the mouse, the hole.*

(c) INCORRECT The apples are *my favorite fruit*
  CORRECT   **Apples** are my favorite fruit.
(d) INCORRECT *The* gold is *a metal*.
  CORRECT   **Gold** is a metal.
	GUIDELINE: Do not use ***the*** with a plural count noun (e.g., apples) *or* a noncount noun (e.g., gold) when you are making a generalization.

(e) INCORRECT: I *drove* car.
  CORRECT: I drove ***a car.***
       I drove ***the car***.
       I drove ***that car***.
	GUIDELINE: Do not use a singular count noun (e.g., car) without:
	  (1) an article (**a/an** or **the**); OR
	  (2) **this/that**; OR
	  (3) a possessive pronoun.

EXERCISE 1: In the following dialogues, try to decide whether the speakers would probably use a/an or the.

1. A: I have _____ idea. Let's go on_____ picnic Saturday.
    B: Okay.

2. A: Did you have fun at _____ picnic yesterday?
    B: Sure did. And you?

3. A: You'd better have_____good reason for being late!
    B: I do.

4. A: Did you think_____ reason Jack gave for being late was   believable?
    B: Not really.

5. A: Where's my blue shirt?
    B: It's in _____washing machine. You'll have to   wear_____different shirt.

6. A: I wish we had_____washing machine.
    B: So do I. It would make it a lot easier to do our laundry.

7. A: What happened to your bicycle?_____front wheel is bent.
    B: I ran into_____parked car when I swerved to avoid_____big   pothole in the street.
    A: Did you damage_____car?
    B: A little.

A: What did you do?

B: I left_____note for_____owner of_____car.

A: What did you write on_____note?

B: My name and address. I also wrote_____apology.

8. A: Can you repair my car for me?

   B: What's wrong with it?

   A: _____radiator has_____leak, and one
      of_____windshield wipers dosen't work.

   B: Can you show me where_____leak is?

9. A: Have you seen my boots?

   B: They're in_____closet in_____front hallway.

EXERCISE 2: Complete the sentences with a/an, the, or leave blank if sentence is already correct.

1._____beef is a kind of_____meat.

2. _____beef we had for dinner last night was excellent.

3. Jack is wearing_____straw hat today.

4. Jack likes to wear_____hats.

5. _____hat is_____article of clothing.

6. _____hats are_____articles of clothing.

7. _____brown hats on that hook over there belongs to Mark.

8. Everyone has_____problems in _____life.

9. My grandfather had_____long life.

10. That book is about_____life of Helen Keller.

11. Tommy wants to be_____engineer when he grows up.

12. The Brooklyn Bridge was designed by_____engineer.

13. John Roebling is_____name of_____engineer who designed
    the Brooklyn Bridge. He died in 1869 from_____infection. He
    died before_____bridge was completed.

14. _____people wear_____jewelry to make themselves more
     attractive.

15. _____jewelry Diana is wearing today is beautiful.