

Indefinite articles: **a/an**

Definite article: **the**

(Note: articles are sometimes called *determiners*)

Rules:

1. Use an indefinite article before singular count nouns where **a/an** means “one”.  
ex. Eve ate an apple.
2. Use **a, an**, or **no article** with generic references (a generic noun is a symbol representing a whole group of people, places, or things). Here, the article means “any/all”.  
ex. Consequently, women have been blamed for sin. Is a woman really that powerful?
3. Use **a/an** when there is no specific person/place/thing; therefore, the implied meaning is “some/any”. Note: for count nouns use **a/an**, but for non-count use **some**.  
ex. You should call a friend and go have some fun.
4. Use **a/an** when the noun is being first introduced to the reader.  
ex. I saw a house that has a big yard. I want to buy the home because the yard would be a perfect place to plant tulips.
5. Use the definite article (the) before singular and plural count nouns that have a specific / concrete reference.  
ex. Because the moon was full, I could see the owl swoop down and catch a mouse.
6. Use **the** with superlative nouns.  
ex. Venus is the brightest star in the sky.
7. Use **the** when you mention a noun for the second time.  
ex. I saw a house I would love to buy. The house is in the perfect location.
8. Use **the** when the noun is known to both writer and reader.  
ex. John is studying in the library.
9. Use **the** with the following types of common nouns:  
Time periods: ex. in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening  
Note. Use “at” as follows: at noon, at night, at midnight  
Parts of the body in prepositional phrase: ex. He cut himself on the leg.  
Nouns that name social/economic classes: ex. the middle class, the rich, the poor, the young, the old  
Nouns that name a special group: ex. the government, the media, the press, the disabled

10. Use **the** with the following types of proper nouns:  
Nouns showing a collection (which shows when they contain an “of” phrase):  
the University of Southern California, the United States of America
- Geographic names containing the word, Kingdom, Republic, or Union: the Dominican Republic, the United Kingdom
- Plural Geographic names: the Philippines, the Rocky Mountains
- Bodies of water: the Pacific, the Amazon
- Regions: the Middle East, the South, the Pacific Northwest
- Points on the globe: the North Pole, the equator
- Deserts and forests: the Mojave, the Black forest.
- Named sites and roads: the Empire State Building, the 405
- Historical periods and events: the Civil War, the Chin dynasty
- Named documents, journals: the Constitution, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The New York Times* (capitalize if the publications uses it as a title)
- Plural family members when referring to all members of the family: the Bushes (notice use of plural in the name)
- Adjectives naming nationalities: the British, the Swiss
- Titles that refer to a unique person: the Pope, the President
- Electronic sources: the Internet, the World Wide Web
- Ships, train, space vehicles: the Titanic, the Orient Express, the Challenger

Exercise (add **a/an**, **the**, or **0**):

\_\_\_ Astronauts who make \_\_\_ journey to Mars will have to be tolerant and cooperative. Mark Shepanek, who is \_\_\_ psychologist for \_\_\_ National Aeronautics and Space Administration, said, “Imagine taking \_\_\_ car trip with your family. Imagine that you can’t get out of \_\_\_ car. Imagine that \_\_\_ bathroom and \_\_\_ meals are in the car with you. Do you think you might have \_\_\_ problem getting along with each other?”

Answer

Astronauts who make the journey to Mars will have to be tolerant and cooperative. Mark Shepanek, who is a psychologist for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, said, “Imagine taking a car trip with your family. Imagine that you can’t get out of the car. Imagine that a bathroom and meals are in the car with you. Do you think you might have a problem getting along with each other?”