



Introduction to using ‘articles’

Articles are words or phrases that come at the beginning of a noun phrase telling us whether the information is new or familiar. They also tell us something about quantity.

Categories of Articles

- Indefinite article: **a** and **an**
- Definite article: **the**

Note: We use the term **zero article or []** for instances where the article is left out.

Idioms and other Fixed Expressions

- In a lot of idiomatic expressions, articles are used or left out for no apparent reasons other than they belong or don’t belong in the expressions.
- In these instances, learners have to remember the whole phrase, ignoring general rules or sub-rules.

Example

a bit of	in a hurry	make a start	have a drink
on the coast	in the pink	off the record	do a turn
go to the wall	play the blues	through the nose	
in [] debt	on [] loan	out of [] action	

Where do articles appear in sentences?

Articles are part of noun phrases and come:

- at the beginning, immediately before a noun or an adjective
- before a combination of adverb, adjective and noun

Example

I heard **a** noise (noun)

I heard **an** eerie noise (adjective + noun)

I heard **the** strangely muffled noise (adverb + adjective + noun).



How do we choose articles?

The kind of noun that follows the article affects our choice.

- We can leave out articles before:
 - plural nouns: **[] Dreams often come true**
 - uncountable nouns: **Give me [] money**

- An article is only left out before a singular noun if it is replaced with another determiner:
 - possessive adjectives: **her brother**
 - demonstrative adjectives: **that book**
 - many quantifiers: **any occasion, each day**

Example

	Singular nouns	Plural nouns	Uncountable nouns
a/an	a book	-	-
no article	-	[] books	[] rice
the	the book	the books	the rice

References

Adapted from Parrott, M 2010, *Grammar for English language teachers*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.