

What is an article? Basically, an article is an adjective. Like adjectives, articles modify nouns.

English has two articles: the and a/an. The is used to refer to specific or particular nouns; a/an is used to modify non-specific or non-particular nouns. We call the *definite* article and a/an the *indefinite* article.

the = definite article

a/an = indefinite article

For example, if I say, "Let's read the book," I mean a *specific* book. If I say, "Let's read a book," I mean *any* book rather than a specific book.

Here's another way to explain it: The is used to refer to a *specific* or *particular* member of a group. For example, "I just saw the most popular movie of the year." There are many movies, but only one particular movie is the most popular. Therefore, we use the.

"A/an" is used to refer to a *non-specific* or *non-particular* member of the group. For example, "I would like to go see a movie." Here, we're not talking about a *specific* movie. We're talking about *any* movie. There are many movies, and I want to see *any* movie. I don't have a specific one in mind.

Let's look at each kind of article a little more closely.

Indefinite Articles: a and an

"A" and "an" signal that the noun modified is indefinite, referring to *any* member of a group. For example:

- "My daughter really wants a dog for Christmas." This refers to *any* dog. We don't know which dog because we haven't found the dog yet.
- "Somebody call a policeman!" This refers to *any* policeman. We don't need a specific policeman; we need any policeman who is available.
- "When I was at the zoo, I saw an elephant!" Here, we're talking about a single, non-specific thing, in this case an elephant. There are probably several elephants at the zoo, but there's only *one* we're talking about here.

Definite Article: the

The definite article is used before singular and plural nouns when the noun is specific or particular. The signals that the noun is definite, that it refers to a particular member of a group. For example:

"The dog that bit me ran away." Here, we're talking about a *specific* dog, the dog that bit me.

"I was happy to see the policeman who saved my cat!" Here, we're talking about a *particular* policeman. Even if we don't know the policeman's name, it's still a particular policeman because it is the one who saved the cat.

"I saw the elephant at the zoo." Here, we're talking about a *specific* noun. Probably there is only one elephant at the zoo.