

Articles - A and An

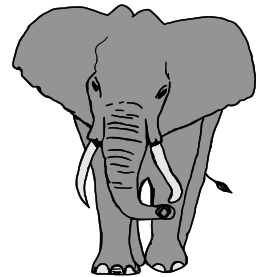
An

If the first letter of the word proceeding it makes a vowel-sound - a, e, i, o, u - then you use the article 'an'.

I saw an elephant.

Can I have an ice cream?

I've never seen an octopus.



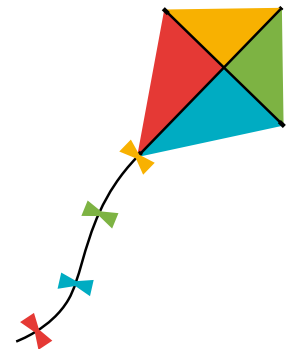
A

If the first letter of the word proceeding it makes a consonant-sound - b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, z - then you use the article 'a'.

I'd like a milkshake.

Could I have a coffee, please?

I would like to buy a kite.

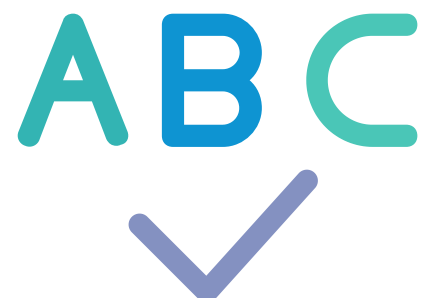


We use 'a' and 'an' depending on the word that immediately follows the article. This may not always be the noun.

Examples

Emma is a doctor (noun).

Emma is an enthusiastic (adjective) doctor.



Articles - A and An

Specifics

We use 'a/an' with countable singular nouns to make clear to the reader who/what we are talking about.

Examples

Police are searching for a 15-year-old boy.
She is an aunt of mine.

We also use 'a/an' to show that they are one person/thing within a group.

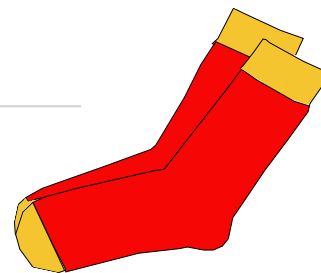
Examples

He is an Apple employee.
She is a member of the club.

We *don't* use 'a/an' with uncountable plural nouns.

Examples

- ✗ He was wearing ~~a~~ red socks.
- ✓ He was wearing red socks.
- ✗ She was making ~~an~~ rice to go with the dinner.
- ✓ She was making rice to go with the dinner.



We also use 'a' or 'an' when we're trying to explain who someone is or what job they have.

Examples

My mother is a professor.
Isabelle is an artist.



We sometimes use 'a' or 'an' with a singular noun to talk generally about something. We can also use these general statements to talk about all things of the same kind.

Examples

A man's best friend is his dog.
(Meaning: every man's best friend is his dog.)
A leopard can't change its spots.
(Meaning: all leopards are incapable of changing their spots.)

Articles - The

When to
use 'the'

There is only one.

Examples

The Pope lives in Rome.

The Queen of England is very old.

To show there is only one in that place or in that area.

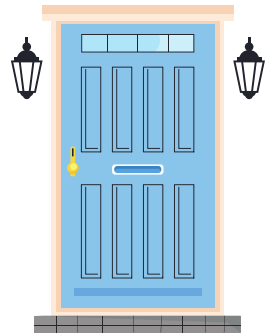
Examples

We live in the house with the blue door.

(Meaning: there is only one house with a blue door.)

You'll find the folder on the desk.

(Meaning: there is only one folder on the desk.)



With a superlative adjective.

Examples

My brother is the tallest person in my house.

My sister is the most intelligent of my cousins.

When referring to musical instruments.

Examples

A friend of mine plays the piano.

I've always wanted to learn how to play the guitar.

With countries that have kingdom, states or republic in the name.

Examples

I visited the United Kingdom in 2017.

I've always wanted to see the United States.

My sister spent three years in the Argentine Republic.



Articles - The

When to
use 'the'

With countries that have plural names.

Examples

The Bahamas is beautiful this time of year.

My sister is on holiday in the Maldives.

We use 'the' with some mountains but not when it has mount or mountain in the name.

Examples

We climbed Mount Olympus. (Correct.)

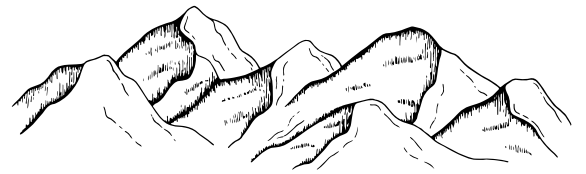
We climbed the Mount Olympus. (Incorrect.)

Before the name of rivers.

Examples

I walk past the river Thames every morning.

I'd love to sail on the river Severn.



In reference to newspapers.

Examples

I read The New York Times every morning.

My favourite newspaper is The Guardian.

My parents always read The Independent.



For buildings or well-known pieces of art (**the Louvre, the Mona Lisa**), hotels (**the Hilton**), pubs (**the Royal Oak**), and families (**the Obamas**).

Find practice activities
on the Intrepid English
website!