

Article Chart

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	Specific (This one, that one) (This/that group) Which one? Which ones?	Non-Specific Any one Any group One of many One of many groups	Generic In general
Count Singular	The apple The bird The child	An apple A bird A child	* *
Count Plural	The apples The birds The children	Some apples Some birds Some children	Apples Birds Children
Non-count	The water The information	Some water Some information	Water Information

Notes:

Specific articles are used with nouns which have been identified previously. (The speaker and the listener both know which thing/person/substance/idea is being referred to.)

The teacher is coming up **the** stairs.

(Both listener and speaker know which teacher and which stairs.)

Give me **the** red shirt. (I know which one you are talking about.)

Non-specific articles are used with nouns that have not been identified previously (by *both* the speaker and the listener.) They are used with items that have not been singled-out yet. (Note: As soon as the items are identified, they require a specific article.)

I want **a** candy bar. (Any candy bar will do.)

Which one do you want? (Asking for specification)

The one on the right. (I choose that one.)

Give me **some** milk. (Any milk is fine.)

I need **some** new shoes. (But I haven't decided which ones to buy yet.)

I bought **some** shoes at Walmart. (I know which shoes, but you don't.)

These are **the** shoes that I bought. (Now we both know which ones.)

Non-count and *plural* nouns are used **without** articles in the *generic* sense.

Cats are afraid of *dogs*. (in general)

Water is necessary for *survival*.

*However, *singular count* nouns cannot stand alone in a sentence, so an article (usually *a* or *an*) is used.

Oranges contain Vitamin C. (generally)

Orange contains Vitamin C. (incorrect)

An orange contains Vitamin C. (okay)

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