Articles are small words, but they make a big difference in English. The three articles are a, an and the. Many languages do not have articles at all, so if they feel strange to you, do not worry. With a few clear rules and a little practice, they start to feel natural.

A and An - one thing, not special

Use a or an when you talk about one person or thing in a general way, when it is not one special, known thing. We use them only with singular countable nouns, and usually when we mention something for the first time.

- Use a before a consonant sound: a book, a car, a teacher, a university.

- Use

The - the one we both know

Use the when the listener or reader knows exactly which person or thing you mean. That can happen because you already mentioned it, because there is only one of it, or because it is clear from the situation.

- Second mention: I saw a dog. The dog was very friendly.

- Only

Zero article - no article at all

Sometimes good English uses no article. This is called the zero article, and it is just as important as the other rules.

- General plural and uncountable nouns: Dogs are loyal. Water is important.

- Spor

Example sentences

- *I need a pen. This one has no ink.*
- *She ate an orange after lunch.*
- *The teacher asked us a question, and nobody knew the answer.*
- *We watched the moon come up over the hills.*
- *He is an honest shopkeeper, and everyone trusts him.*
- *My father bought a new phone. The phone has a great camera.*
- *Children usually love chocolate and ice cream.*
- *It takes an hour to reach the airport from here.*
- *The best students in the class help the weaker ones.*

- They went to bed early because the train leaves at the station at six.

A quick memory trick: if you can point at it in your mind and say 'that one, you know the one I mean', the word the is probably right. If it is just 'one of many', choose a or an.

Quick practice - choose a, an, the or nothing (-)

1. I saw ___ interesting film last night.
2. She wants to be ___ doctor when she grows up.
3. ___ sun rises in the east.
4. He plays ___ cricket every Sunday with his friends.
5. There is ___ small shop near my house. ___ shop opens at seven.

Answers

1. an - one film, first mention, vowel sound.
2. a - one job, consonant sound.
3. The - there is only one sun.
4. - (nothing) - sports take no article.
5. a, The - first mention a, second mention the.