

WHAT ARE ARTICLES?

An article is a kind of adjective and as you may already know, adjectives modify –or further describe or identify the meaning of other words. There are two main types of adjectives: descriptive and limiting.

Descriptive adjectives describe qualities or attributes [i.e. *gray* sky or *beautiful* morning. Limiting adjectives identify or specify the words they modify. Articles fall into the category of limiting adjectives.

Articles* are a type of *limiting adjective* [adjectives that identify or specify the words they modify].

* **a**, **an**, and **the**

Indefinite and Definite Articles

Articles are further divided into definite and indefinite. **The** is the definite article because it identifies or defines precisely which person or thing is being referred to. The words **a** or **an** are the indefinite articles. For example, if I say, “I wish I had *the* umbrella”, it means that I’m referring to a particular umbrella. Maybe I’m thinking of my red and purple polka dotted umbrella that’s in my car. If I say, “I wish I had *an* umbrella”, it means that I wish I had *any* umbrella – I am not specifying a particular one.

Definite Article: **The** identifies *exactly* which person or thing is being referred to.

Indefinite Article: **a** or **an** does not specify a particular person or thing.

When to use “a” or “an “

Whether a or an should be used depends on the first letter of the word following the article. “A” should be used when the following word begins with a consonant (a chair) and an is used when the word begins with a vowel (an apple). The only exception is when the word begins with a long u sound – i.e. *a university, a unicorn*.

Use **a** when the following word begins with a consonant or a long *u* sound (i.e. a road, a university)

Use **an** when the following word begins with a vowel (a, e, i, o, u) (i.e. an apple, an office)