

English as a Second Language (ESL): Use of Articles

In English, there are **definite** (*the*) and **indefinite articles** (*a, an*). The use of these articles depends on specific rules.

- I. Indefinite Articles:** Indefinite articles refer to indefinite nouns or nouns that refer to any member of a group. Use **a** to indicate that the noun is singular, begins with a consonant sound, and is not specifically identified. For example:

- **A raindrop fell from the sky.** (One raindrop fell from the sky, and whichever one it was out of the whole group does not matter.)
- **A user can access his account with the password.** (*user* begins with a vowel, yet it has the consonant sound “*yoo*,” so the indefinite article **A** is used.)

Use **an** to indicate that the noun is singular and indefinite when the noun begins with a vowel sound.

- **An ant crawled into the picnic basket.** (*ant* is singular and indefinite)
- **An elephant escaped from the zoo.** (*elephant* is singular and indefinite)

Use **some** when the noun is a plural count noun or when the noun is an indefinite noncount noun. A **count noun** is a noun that can be counted such as the noun *table* (*How many tables are there?*). On the other hand, **noncount nouns** cannot be counted such as the noun *rice* (You cannot say, *How many rices are there?*).

- **Some girls went to the zoo.** (*Some* refers to a plural count noun)
- **Some change is in my wallet.** (*Some* refers to an indefinite noncount noun)

Examples of Count Nouns

bird	house	finger	chair	word
remark	girl	bottle	award	candidate
baby	library	cat	poem	desk

Examples of Noncount Nouns

advice	furniture	fun	grammar	happiness
junk	mail	news	traffic	milk
anger	warmth	education	progress	courage

In addition to **some**, you can also use the words **two, a few, several, a lot of, etc.**, with plural count nouns and the words **a little, a lot of, etc.**, with noncount nouns.

- **A few girls went to the zoo.** (*A few* refers to a plural count noun)
- **A little change is in my wallet.** (*A little* refers to an indefinite noncount noun)

II. Definite Articles: Definite articles refer to nouns that are specific to both the speaker and the listener. Use **the** with both singular and plural count nouns and noncount nouns, but the noun must be specific.

- **The piano is in the living room.** (*piano* is a singular count noun)
- **The dishes need to be washed.** (*dishes* is a plural count noun)
- **The fruit is ripe for picking.** (*fruit* is a noncount noun)

Use **this/that** to refer to nouns that are definite and singular but only when they are count and noncount nouns.

- **That boy lost his toy.** (*boy* is a singular count noun)
- **This milk has expired.** (*milk* is a noncount noun)

Use **these/those** to refer to nouns that are definite plural count nouns.

- **These shoes have holes in them.** (*shoes* is a plural count noun)
- **Those kittens are free.** (*kittens* is a plural count noun)

III. No Articles: No article is needed when you are making generalizations with plural count nouns and noncount nouns.

- **Peaches grow on trees.** (*Peaches* is a plural count noun)
- **Education is important.** (*Education* is a noncount noun)