

## A vs. An

An is used before a word beginning with a vowel *sound*

an apple, an accident  
an hour, but a horrible event  
a university, but an unusual event

Use *a* or *an* before the following words.

_____ argument	_____ European journalist
_____ unavoidable delay	_____ honest man
_____ half hour	_____ yellow dress
_____ union	_____ humid day
_____ heiress	_____ unanimous decision
_____ humiliating experience	_____ uninvited guest
_____ herb	_____ universal feeling
_____ ugly child	_____ historical occasion
_____ unique opportunity	_____ underdeveloped country
_____ garage	_____ human being
_____ holiday	_____ huge tree
_____ umbrella	_____ humorous story
_____ hourly application	_____ hospital
_____ useful gadget	_____ honorable person

## Article vs. No Article

The most important rule about the use of articles is that *an article is required with a singular countable noun*.

I need \_\_\_\_\_ furniture (noncountable noun)  
I need \_\_\_\_\_ chairs (plural countable noun)  
I need \_\_\_\_\_ the or a \_\_\_\_\_ chair (singular countable noun)

## Articles

### *The* (Definite Article)

Developed from a word meaning *this*.

Signals a *particular* person or thing—the *student sitting next to you*.

Used with singular or plural nouns.

### *A* (Indefinite Article)

Developed from a word meaning *one*. *An* used before vowel sounds.

Signals and *unspecified* one of others—a *student sitting in the front row*.

Used chiefly with singular countable nouns.

#### Uses

1. For known persons or objects in the environment--*He walked into the house and hung his coat in the closet*
2. For persons, things, or ideas particularized by the verbal context
  - a. Preceding context--*A strange dog came onto the porch. The dog seemed very friendly.*
  - b. Following context-- *The man standing near the window will be our guest speaker tonight.*
3. For a class as a whole-- *The lion is an animal.*
4. With a "ranking" adjective--*the best way, the fifth lesson.*
5. With nouns or gerunds + of phrases--*the election of officers; the changing of the guards.*
6. In of phrases after words of quantity--*most of the men in the factory; four of the children from that school*
7. For place names--*the Mississippi River; the Alps*

#### Uses

1. In the sense of *one*, or *each*--*waited an hour. His rent is \$200 a month.*
2. For an unidentified number of a class--*We saw a lion at the zoo.*
3. For a representative member of a class
  - a. Identifying an individual member  
*That animal is a lion.*
  - b. Defining a smaller class  
*The lion is an animal.*

*Exercises*

Supply the article if it is required. Give the reason why you did or did not use the with the noncountable nouns.

Example:

a. The genius of Edison is universally recognized. (Genius is followed by the modifier of Edison.)

b. \_\_\_\_\_ genius is 10% inspiration and 90% perspiration. (There is no modifier after genius.)

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1. \_\_\_\_\_ bread has been called the staff of life.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ bread you baked is delicious.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ silver is used for money and jewelry.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ silver in this ring is of an inferior quality.
5. He is studying \_\_\_\_\_ religion.
6. I would like to know more about \_\_\_\_\_ strange religion of these primitive people.
7. In order to survive, we must all have \_\_\_\_\_ food and \_\_\_\_\_ water.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ food in the restaurant near me is fairly good.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ water used in this beer comes from a special spring.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ psychology of birds and animals would be an interesting subject to study.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ psychology tells us a great deal about human nature.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ smoke coming from the forest fire can be seen for miles around.
13. Where there's \_\_\_\_\_ smoke, there's \_\_\_\_\_ fire.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ baseball is the favorite sport of most Americans.
15. The American Constitution guarantees \_\_\_\_\_ life, \_\_\_\_\_ liberty, and \_\_\_\_\_ pursuit of happiness.
16. \_\_\_\_\_ transportation has always been a problem in that area because of the bad roads.