ARTICLES
How to Choose the Right One

A/AN:
A or an are used to refer to singular, countable nouns. A or an will probably be used when it is not important to know which specific noun you are referring to in the sentence.

A is used before singular, countable nouns beginning with a consonant sound.
   For example: a student, a professor, a pencil, a scantron
An is used before singular, countable nouns beginning with a vowel sound.
   For example: an athlete, an essay, an intern, an office, an undergraduate

Be careful!
Some nouns begin with vowel letters that have long “u” sounds. Use a before these nouns.
   For example: a eulogy, a European, a union, a university
Some nouns begin with a consonant letter but have a vowel sound because the consonant is silent (written but not pronounced). Use an before these nouns.
   For example: an honor, an hour

THE:
The is used to refer to specific nouns, both singular and plural. The will be used when you are referring to a specific noun.
   For example: John jumps into the Reflecting Pond during Spirit Splash.
               (John can only be in one specific pond.)
Are the students enjoying Spirit Splash?
               (The speaker is referring to specific students, not all students.)

The is used with the superlative (“est”) forms of adjectives and adverbs.
   For example: Knightro is the coolest person on campus.
               UCF is the largest school in Florida.
               The first Homecoming celebration was held on campus in February 1971.

The is used when you are speaking about part of a group. The word “of” is usually a signal.
   For example: Most of the people at the football game were excited.
The is used before ordinal numbers used as adjectives.

For example: Dr. Trevor Colbourn was the second president of UCF.

The is used to indicate a specific order, location, position, or time of the day.

For example: Get to the bookstore early or you will be at the end of a long line.

The Student Union is at the center of campus.

Many students dislike attending class early in the morning.

The is used before specific political or governmental titles or units.

For example: The Dean is the head of the College of Arts and Humanities.

When to omit articles:

No article is needed before countries whose names are only one word.

For example: Some UCF Knights were born in Romania.

No article is needed before abstract nouns.

For example: Professors greatly admire diligence in students.

What to do when making generalizations:

A or An is used to make basic generalizations when one member of a large group is used to refer to all items of the group.

For example: A student from UCF is a Knight.

This is understood to mean “Any UCF student that you choose is a Knight.”

An athlete from UCF is a winner.

This is understood to mean “Any UCF athlete that you choose is a winner.”

The is used before an adjective when it refers to a group in generalizations.

For example: How can SGA help the poor?

No article is needed when using plural nouns to make generalizations.

For example: Students from UCF are Knights.

No article is needed when using uncountable nouns to make generalizations.

For example: The computer lab is always running out of paper.

“Paper” is an uncountable quantity, so it needs NO article.