

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.

Handout updated by Jessica Auz.