Articles

What is an Article?
An article helps readers distinguish between countable and non-countable nouns as well as between specific and general nouns. There are only three articles: the, a, and an.

You should use the article “a” before nouns that are

- Singular
- Countable
- General

For example: I bought a book yesterday.

“Book” is a singular noun. It is countable (one book, two books, etc.). And it is used in a general way. I could have bought any book in the world.

You should use “an” before nouns that are

- Singular
- Countable
- General
- AND begin with a, e, i, o, u, or a vowel-sound (hour)

For example: I saw an accident last week.

“Accident” is a singular noun. It is countable (one accident, two accidents, etc.). It is used in a general way; I could be referring to any accident. And “accident” begins with a vowel.

For example: I had to wait for an hour.

“Hour” is a singular noun. It is countable (one hour, two hours, etc.). It is used in a general way. I could be referring to any hour. And “hour” begins with a vowel-sound.

You should NOT use “a” or “an” when the noun is either

- Plural
- OR
- Non-Countable

For example: I bought many books yesterday.

For example: I spilled some water on the floor.

“Books” is a plural noun. Therefore, it does not need “a” or “an” in front of it. “Water” is a non-countable noun (there is water or there is not water – there is no such thing as multiple water). “Some” is sometimes used before non-countable nouns.

You should use “the” when the noun is

- Specific

For example: Yesterday, I saw a dog. The dog was running after a cat.

For example: I finally found the car of my dreams.

For example: The water was very cold.

“Dog” is a specific noun in the second sentence. It is “the dog” that was mentioned in the first sentence. I am NOT referring to any other dog in the world. “The car” is a specific car. I am NOT referring to any other car. “The water” is the specific water that was drunk. It is NOT any other water.