

Article Usage

Comprehensive List of Rules and Exceptions

A/AN

- Rule 1: Use **A** when a singular count noun is indefinite and the article is followed by a consonant sound.
ex: There is a dirt road at the north end of this town.
- Rule 2: Use **AN** when a singular count noun is indefinite and the article is followed by a vowel sound.
ex: He is an honorable man.
- Rule 3: Use **A/AN** after "there is" when referring to a countable noun.
ex: There is a pen on the table.
- Rule 4: Use **A/AN** when mentioning something for the first time.
ex: Look! There's a dog in our yard!
- Rule 5: Use **A** for single letters and numbers that begin with a consonant sound.
ex: John got a "B" on his history test. The professor wrote a "2" on the board.
- Rule 6: Use **AN** for letters and numbers that begin with a vowel sound.
ex: Mary got an "A" on her geology test. The teacher wrote an "8" on the board.
- Rule 7: Use **A/AN** to mean "for each" or "per"
ex: Eggs are only 79 cents a dozen. A plane travels over 600 miles an hour.
- Rule 8: Use **A/AN** before a noun phrase when using the comparative.
ex: Margaret is a better student than her sister. John is an older man than my dad.
- Exception to Rule 8:** Use **THE** with the comparative for double comparatives or when the adjective in a comparison is used as a noun.
ex: The bigger they are, the harder they fall.
ex: I have two brothers. The taller is Donald.
- Rule 9: Use **A** with the words "few" or "little" when they express a positive meaning.
ex: He knows the subject because he has taken a few classes in it.

THE

Rule 10: Use **THE** with in the morning, in the afternoon, or in the evening.
ex: Classes are held in the evening.

Exception to Rule 10: Use \emptyset with at night.
ex: I often watch television at night.

Rule 11: Use **THE** when the noun has already been mentioned.
ex: I saw a dog. The dog ran away.

Rule 12: Use **THE** when the noun that follows is already known.
ex: I picked up my suitcase and the handle broke off.

Rule 13: Use **THE** when the noun is made definite by a prepositional phrase.
ex: The prerequisites for this class are algebra and chemistry.

Exception to Rule 13: Do not use **THE** when the prepositional phrase does not make the noun definite.
ex: I'd like a cup of coffee. (any cup of coffee)

Rule 14: Use **THE** when the noun is made definite by an adjective clause or an adjective phrase.
ex: The man that hired me yesterday left the company today.

Exception to Rule 14: Don't use **THE** when the adjective clause or adjective phrase does not make the noun definite.
ex: I want a pen that works. (any pen that works)

Rule 15: Use **THE** with the superlative.
ex: Alaska is the biggest state in the United States of America.

Rule 16: Use **THE** with ordinal numbers and other ranking words like "next" and "last." ex: The second semester begins in January. I hope you enjoy the next song.

Exception (a) to Rule 16: Do not use an article with ordinal numbers or other ranking words when listing ideas or writing a time sequence (steps).
ex: First, read the sentence. Next, choose an answer. Last, write your choice.

Exception (b) to Rule 16: Do not use an article with ordinal numbers when referring to names of prizes.
ex: Linda won second prize. First prize in the Olympics is a gold medal.

Exception (c) to Rule 16: Do not use an article with "next" or "last" for specific times like "next month", "last Christmas," "next Tuesday," or "last year."
ex: Last year I worked in a bakery. I'll see you next week.

Rule 17: Use **THE** with the names of rivers, oceans, seas, and deserts.
ex: The Congo River is in Africa.

Cole, Tom. *The Article Book*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000.

Rule 18: Use **THE** with plural nouns.

ex: The Rocky Mountains are in the western part of the United States.

Rule 19: Use **THE** with family names followed by a noun or pluralized.

ex: The Rodriguezes bought a house on Cherry Lane. The Smith brothers live next door.

Rule 20: Use **THE** with the names of hotels, motels, theaters, bridges, and buildings.

ex: The Hilton Hotel is located on Main Street.

Exception to Rule 20: Do not use an article with the names of halls or hospitals.

ex: He is a patient at Florida Hospital. I take class in Smith Hall.

Rule 21: Use **THE** with the names of zoos, gardens, museums, institutes, and companies.

ex: Many people say that the San Diego Zoo is the best zoo in the world.

Rule 22: Use **THE** when the noun is the only one that exists.

ex: The sun is only a small object in the galaxy.

Rule 23: Use **THE** with adjectives that act as nouns to describe a group of people.

ex: The poor need the help of the government.

Rule 24: Use **THE** to express the plural of nationalities that have no other plural form.

ex: The French produce excellent wine.

Rule 25: Use **THE** for compass directions if they follow prepositions like to, in, on, at, or from.

ex: To the north, you can see a range of mountains. My house is on the south side of town.

Rule 26: Use **THE** with large periods of historic time like the 1900's, the Jet Age, the Dark Ages, the Cambrian Period, etc.

ex: The Renaissance was a time of great learning.

Rule 27: Use **THE** in special names, titles, and epithets.

ex: Skruff the Hairy One was a character in the novel.

Rule 28: Use **THE** with nouns for military institutions such as the army, the navy, the air force, the marines, and the military as well as the fire department, the police, etc.

ex: He spent ten years in the army. The fire department arrived in time to put out the fire.

Rule 29: Use **THE** with the word "same."

ex: Kathy and I got the same grade.

Rule 30: Use **THE** for body parts that have been touched by an outside object when the direct object is used to refer to the person or animal being touched.

ex: Sid Smith hit Johnny Johnson (direct object) in the eye.

Kate punched me (direct object) in the nose.

John patted the dog (direct object) on the head.

A, AN, or THE

Rule 31: Use **THE** when generalizing about an entire class of musical instruments.
ex: The history of the piano is an interesting one. (the entire class of pianos)

Exception to Rule 31: Use **A, AN, or THE** if the sentence can mean either the general class of instrument or any particular one of the instruments.
ex: The guitar can have six or twelve strings. (entire class) A guitar can have six or twelve strings. (any guitar)

Rule 32: Use **THE** when generalizing about an entire class of animals.
ex: Humans have lived with the dog for thousands of years. (People have not lived with only one dog but with the entire class dogs.)

Exception to Rule 32: Use **A, AN, or THE** if the sentence can mean either the general class of animals or anyone of the animals.
ex: The elephant is a large animal. (entire class)
An elephant is a large animal. (any elephant)

Rule 33: Use **A, AN, or THE** if the sentence can mean either the general class of the invention or anyone of the inventions.
ex: The phonograph reproduces natural sounds. (general class)
A phonograph produces natural sounds. (general class or anyone)

∅ (no article)

- Rule 34: Use ∅ with indefinite (non-specific) plural nouns.
ex: There are automobiles in the parking lot.
- Rule 35: Use ∅ with indefinite (non-specific) non-count nouns.
ex: I drank milk yesterday.
- Rule 36: Use ∅ with the names of streets, avenues, roads, lanes or boulevards.
ex: I live on Ninth Street.
- Rule 37: Use ∅ when generalizing about abstract nouns.
ex: Love is beautiful thing.
- Rule 38: Use ∅ when generalizing in the plural.
ex: Cats can climb trees, but dogs can't.
- Rule 39: Use ∅ with the names of universities or colleges.
ex: My professor graduated from Middlebury College.
- Exception to Rule 39:** Use THE with names of colleges and universities that contain the word of.
ex: She attends the University of Salamanca in Spain.
- Rule 40: Use ∅ with the names of countries, cities, or states.
ex: Germany borders France.
- Exception to Rule 40:** Use THE in the names of countries that contain the words united, union, kingdom, or republic.
ex: The United Arab Emirates is a country in the Middle East.
- Rule 41: Use ∅ for the names of single lakes, mountains, islands, or canyons.
ex: Lake Baikal is the deepest lake in the world.
- Rule 42: Use ∅ for the names of stadiums, malls, or parks.
ex: There is a huge fountain in the middle of Sunshine Mall.
- Rule 43: Use ∅ with the names of languages or religions that have not been made definite.
ex: Buddhism is practiced by millions of people. Spanish is spoken here.
- Exception to Rule 43:** Use THE when the name of a language or religion is used as an adjective followed by a noun.
ex: The English language has words from many other languages.
- Rule 44: Use ∅ with the words few or little if the meaning is especially negative.
ex: I'm sorry; I have few ideas.
ex. She can't stay here very long because she has little time.

Exception to Rule 44: Use A when the words few or little refer to something negative but are used with the words only or just.

ex: I only have a few friends. There is just a little time.

Rule 45: Use Ø if a compass direction immediately follows an action verb like go, travel, turn, look, sail, fly, walk, or move.

ex: We are considering going south this year. Marco Polo traveled east.

Rule 46: Use Ø with forms of go in expressions such as go to bed, goes to school, went to college, going to class, go to church, go to jail, or other common multi-word verbs.

ex: I went to bed last night. Criminals go to jail.

Rule 47: Use Ø with the names of diseases.

ex: Heart disease kills millions every year.

Exception to Rule 47: Use THE with the flu, the measles, the mumps, and the chicken pox.

ex: The measles is a childhood disease.

Rule 48: Use Ø when referring to numbers or letters in a list.

ex: Could you read number 1, please?