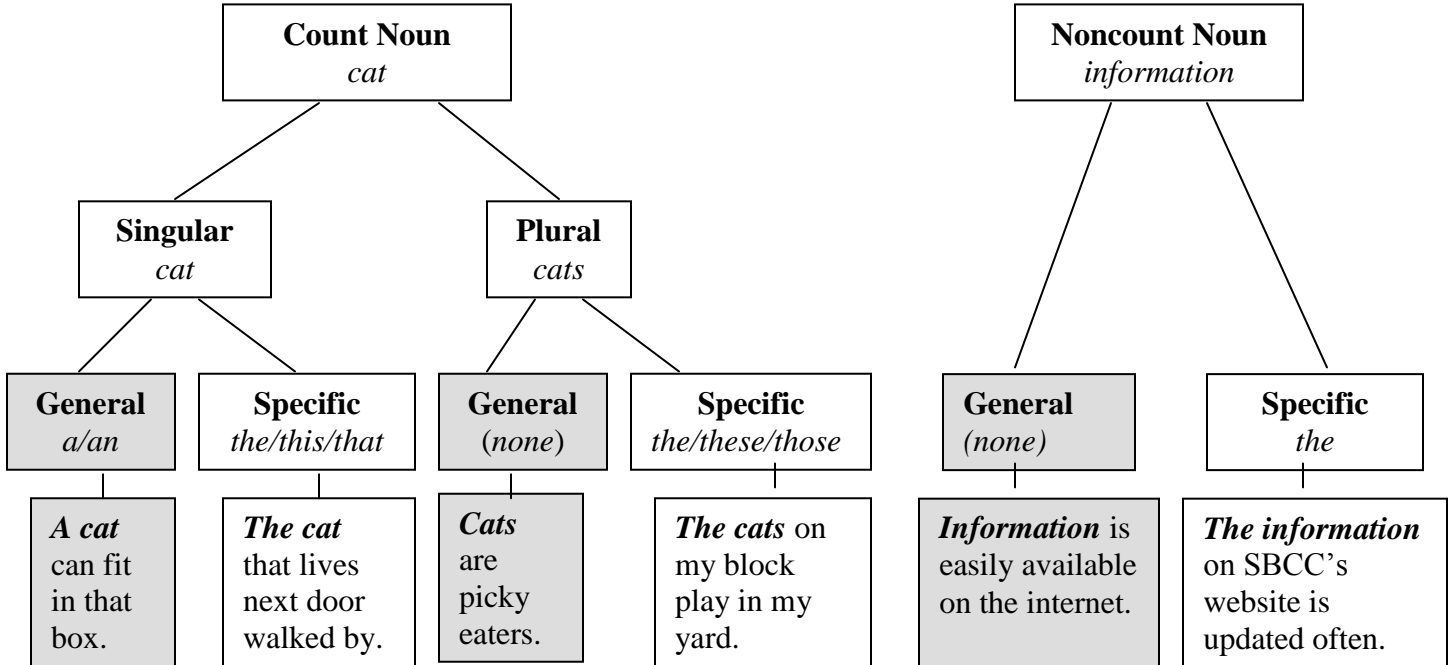


BASIC ARTICLE USAGE

Use this chart to help you determine correct article usage. Refer to the definitions, examples, and exceptions listed after it. This handout offers just the basics; use other resources as needed.



IS THE NOUN A COUNT OR NONCOUNT NOUN?

- **Count nouns** refer to things that can be divided up into smaller units which are separate and distinct from one another. They usually refer to what can individually be seen or heard: **desk, parent, computer, bridge, country.**
- **Noncount nouns** refer to things that cannot be counted because 1) they are regarded as wholes which cannot be divided into parts: **furniture, education, weather,** or they refer to abstractions and occasionally have a collective meaning: **anger, warmth, leisure, courage.**

IS IT SINGULAR OR PLURAL?

- Only **count** nouns can be pluralized (to show more than one) by adding a final -s or -es to the nouns: instructor = **instructors**; house = **houses**
- **Noncount** nouns cannot be pluralized at all: information = **information** (not informations)

Some exceptions for count/noncount plurals: Certain nouns in English can have both a noncount and a count meaning. Usually, the noncount meaning is abstract, general, or cannot be divided into parts, and the count meaning is concrete and specific.

Count sense

- There were colorful **lights** and musical **sounds**.
- The loud **arguments** between the senators in the hall could be heard throughout the meeting room.

Noncount sense

- **Light** travels faster than **sound**.
- **Argument** is respected in academic discourse.

IS IT GENERAL OR SPECIFIC?

Next, determine what the meaning of the noun is in the context of the sentence:

- General** nouns refer to any member of a group or the group as a whole and only take the indefinite article **a** or **an** for singular count nouns.
 - Specific** nouns refer to a particular member of a group and take the definite article **the**.
- Buying **an electric car** can save resources. ➤ Singular count + general = no particular electric car
 - **The student** in front of the line is my friend. ➤ Singular count + specific = a particular student
 - **Adults** must learn to live on a budget. ➤ Plural count noun + general = all adults
 - **The women** arrived at the theater on time. ➤ Plural count noun + specific = particular women
 - **Water** is a soothing element. ➤ Noncount + general = all water
 - **The water** in Lake Casitas is very cold. ➤ Noncount + specific = particular water

ADDITIONAL ARTICLE RULES:

Use an indefinite article (a, an) the first time something is mentioned. Use a definite article (the) when it is mentioned again.	A man dressed in a green woolen coat walked by the classroom window. The man was bent against the wind and clutched his scarf around his neck.
Never use articles for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Names of languages: <i>Chinese, Urdu</i>. • Names of sports: <i>volleyball, basketball</i>. • Names of academic subjects: <i>mathematics, biology, communication</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He said that Chinese is difficult to learn. • Playing basketball keeps her in shape. • Biology is my favorite subject right now.
Singular proper nouns generally do not use an article.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mercedes-Benz is dropping its prices next week. • James Joyce wrote complicated novels.
Plural proper nouns are preceded by the .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The LA Dodgers won the World Series again. • The Zapatistas were victorious in battle.
Use an article when there is only one of the item.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sun is bright today. • The President passed the law yesterday.

Correct the following article mistakes. There may be more than one in a sentence!

1. I tried to type essay at home, but a computer was not working properly.
2. Although he tried diligently, policeman could not prevent a robbery from occurring.
3. My cousin likes to play the soccer every afternoon at neighborhood park.
4. The livingroom furnitures were covered in dust due to windstorm that morning.
5. Governor of California used to be actor in popular movies.