

Articles (A, AN, THE) and Other Words Required Before Nouns

Rules for Singular Countable Nouns

Before a singular and countable noun (such as “tree”) you must use one of these words:

- Article A/AN: **A tree**
 - Means any tree: **A tree** was growing here last year
 - Use A/AN the first time you talk about the tree: I saw **a palm tree** at the beach
- Article THE: The tree
 - Means a specific tree you already talked about before: **The palm tree** I saw was beautiful
 - If there is only one of them: **The Christmas tree** in our house
- Possessive noun: **Jack’s tree**
- Possessive pronoun (MY, YOUR, ITS, HIS, HER): **My tree**
- Indefinite pronoun (EACH, EVERY, EITHER, ANY, SOME): **Each tree; any tree**
- Question pronouns (WHICH, WHAT): **Which tree ...?**
- Demonstrative adjectives (THIS, THAT): **That tree**

Rules for Using Articles A or AN:

- Use “AN” before a noun that begins with a vowel (a, e, i, o, u): **an apple; an egg**
or
before a noun that sounds like it begins with a vowel: **an hour** (sounds like it begins with “o”, like “our”)
- Use “A” before a noun that begins with a letter that is not a vowel: **a tree; a dog**
or
before a noun that sounds like it begins with a non-vowel: **a university** (sounds like it begins with “y”, like “you”)

Rules for Plural Countable Nouns and Non-Countable Nouns

For plural countable nouns (such as “trees”) or non-countable nouns (such as “water”):

- Use no article if you mean all of them: **Trees** are usually green; **water** is good to drink
- Use “THE” if you mean specific ones: **The trees** at school are small; **the water** here is cold