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When to use the articles - a, an, the?

Created: Tuesday, 12 November 2013 04:56 | Published: Saturday, 23 November 2013 12:21 | Written by Monika Agarwal | Print

Let's begin this informative article by understanding what is an article in English? An article is usually considered a type of adjective. How? Well, just like an adjective modifies the noun, so does an article. The English language has two types of articles: 'the' and 'a'/ 'an'.



We call:

'the'= definite article

'a'/ 'an'= indefinite one.

Read on to understand the reason and get more familiar with articles.

English grammar needs practice and understanding to begin with. It is something that needs to be well-understood and mastered. For instance like in the case of articles. Many English students, more than often, make mistakes with articles such as 'a', 'an' and 'the'. You should be aware of a fact that the basic rule for using 'a', 'an' and 'the' does not depend upon the spelling of the word it is placed before; instead it depends on the pronunciation of the word.

Definite article 'the':

The definite article 'the' is made use of before singular and plural nouns when the noun is particular and specific.

For instance:

1. "The field was full of creepy insects that caught my attention on reaching there."

In this case, it is clear and evident that we're referring to and talking about a particular field and not a generic use of the noun. Hence, the prefix 'the'.

2. "It was the peacock at the zoo that held my attention throughout."

Here again 'the' is being used for a specific zoo and a particular peacock.

Indefinite article 'a'/ 'an':

The use of articles 'a' and 'an' mean the noun that they're supporting is indefinite. This means that it is referring to one among the group.

For instance:

1. "It was New Year's Eve and I really wanted to eat a warm pie."

Take note of the fact that a particular pie is not being spoken about.

2. "Can somebody please call a security guard?"

This means that you need any security guard from the lot irrespective of who or someone in particular.

3. "While I was on a walk, my mom scrambled me an egg for breakfast."

'An' egg refers to one egg from the dozen of eggs in the refrigerator. It does not specify anything in particular.

4. "My wish is to ride an elephant at the age of 75."

Here you could be referring to any elephant in general.

Understanding The Use Of 'a', 'an' And 'the':

In most cases, the article 'an' is used before words that begin with vowels. (a, e, i, o, u)

Use of 'an':

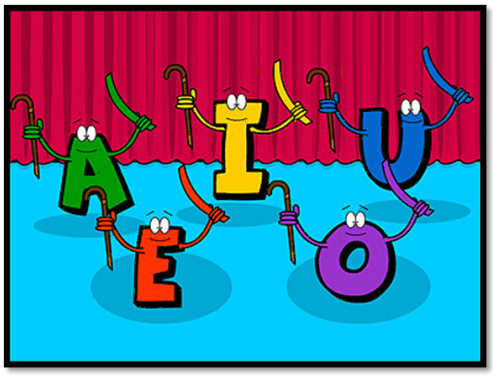
1. An apple

2. An elephant

3. An oven

4. An umbrella

5. An igloo



Use of 'a':

If a word starts with a consonant sound, use a.

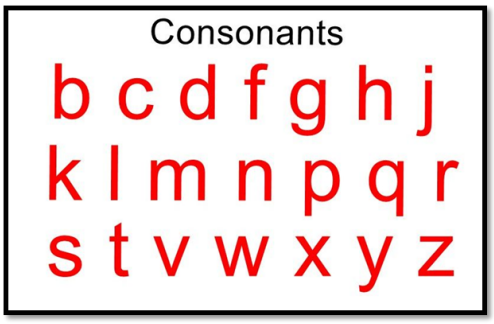
1. A cat

2. A wish

3. A needle

4. A cart

5. A twig



Use of 'the':

We use 'the' to refer to nouns that have already been mentioned or when it is understandable what particular thing is being referred to. Therefore 'the' refers to things which are definite, specific or unique.

1. The World Bank

2. The Police

3. The security

4. The Russians

5. The movement

The above mentioned explanation is a quick run through on the appropriate use of articles. Sharpening your know-how about articles will enable you tospeak in fluent English without making minute grammatical errors. Keeping your English communication skills at its polished best will develop an inner confidence in you. So, waste no more of your precious time andlearn English Grammar through the online spoken English courses provided by eAgeTutor.

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- By Monika Agarwal

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