

Understanding Nouns

- ❖ Before learning about articles, we need to have a clear understanding of nouns and how they function. A common noun is a person, place, or thing that is doing/being something, e.g. *The aim of the project was to develop software that could analyse the data faster.*
- ❖ Nouns or noun phrases often act as the subject of a sentence.
- ❖ Other nouns may include: 1) proper nouns, which are named people, places, or things that take an initial capital letter, e.g. *Alice, Dublin, Starbucks, Pfizer*, etc.; and 2) abstract nouns, which refer to ideas, emotions, concepts, e.g. *justice, fear, analysis*.
- ❖ Nouns are grouped into 2 types: **countable nouns** and **uncountable nouns** (also known as mass nouns, or noncount nouns), which are explained in the table below with examples.

	Countable Nouns	Uncountable Nouns
Definition	Nouns that can be counted in numbers as individual items, and which take both singular and plural forms.	Nouns that refer to a mass of something or an abstract concept, which that cannot be counted in numbers (although they can counted be with a unit of measurement), and which only take a singular form.
Some Examples	<i>student, car, book, module, assignment, hour, minute, table, experiment, idea.</i>	<i>knowledge, research, information, data, water, air, advice, money, time, weather, traffic, happiness, love, freedom, progress, music, evidence.</i>
Relationship with Articles	Can be used with the indefinite articles “a” and “an”, and can be used with the definite article “the”.	Generally cannot be used with the indefinite articles “a” and “an”, but can be used with the definite article “the”.
Plural Form	Has a plural form, e.g. <i>students, cars, books, modules, assignments, hours, minutes, tables, experiments, ideas.</i>	Typically does not have a plural form, e.g. in most contexts, it is incorrect to say: <i>knowledges, researches, informations, datas, waters, airs, advices, moneys, times, weathers, traffics, happinesses, progresses, musics, evidences.</i>
How to Quantify	Can be quantified using numbers or other expressions, e.g. <i>one, two, many, few, fewer.</i>	Can be quantified using expressions of measurement, e.g. <i>some, much, a lot of, little, less.</i>
Example in a Sentence	<i>The library had <u>82 books</u> about Kantian philosophy.</i> “Book” is a countable noun, and so the plural form is taken here to count the number of books.	<i>The <u>information</u> gathered from the surveys was crucial for the dissertation.</i> “Information” is an uncountable noun referring to an abstract concept, and so we cannot count it in numbers or take a plural form.
How Much vs. How Many?	Can be used with “how many?” (which refers to numbers), but not with “how much?” (which refers to measurement). For example: <i><u>How many</u> experiments have you conducted?</i>	Can be used with “how much?” (which refers to measurement), but not with “how many?” (which refers to numbers). For example: <i><u>How much</u> research is required? <u>How much</u> time is needed?</i>

What is an Article?

In grammar, an article is a word used before a noun to indicate whether the noun is a specific thing or something general. The 2 types of articles in English are **Definite Articles** and **Indefinite Articles**.

	1. The Definite Article	2. Indefinite Articles	
Word	“The”	“A”	“An”
Function	We use “the” when we are referring to a specific noun that is known, or which has already been mentioned.	We use “a” when we are referring to a non-specific noun or something general, which begins with a consonant.	We use “an” when we are referring to a non-specific noun, or something general, which begins with a vowel.
Examples	<p><i>The results of the experiment were consistent with the hypothesis that the student proposed earlier in the study.</i></p> <p>Here, “results”, “experiment”, “hypothesis”, “student”, and “study” all refer to specific nouns that have been discussed/ explained already. Because of this, each noun is preceded by definite article, which assumes that the nouns are known to the reader.</p> <p>If you are not sure whether you should use the definite article, consider whether the reader knows the answers to the following questions: <i>What results? What experiment? What hypothesis? What student? What study?</i> If the reader knows the answers, then you should use the definite article.</p>	<p><i>Effective analysis requires examining a dataset carefully to ensure that results are valid and reliable.</i></p> <p>Here, “dataset” refers to any dataset in general, not a specific one. Because the noun is non-specific, it is preceded by the indefinite article, which assumes that the noun is only broadly known to the reader.</p> <p>If you are not sure whether you should use the indefinite article, consider whether the reader needs to know the answer to the following question: <i>Which dataset?</i> If the reader does not need to know the answer (because you are referring to datasets in general), then you should use the indefinite article.</p>	<p><i>He wrote an essay suggesting that artificial intelligence could impact students’ critical engagement.</i></p> <p>Here, “essay” refers to one study of many without specifying which one. Because the noun is non-specific, it is preceded by the indefinite article, which assumes that the noun is not known to the reader. Because the noun begins with the vowel “e”, the indefinite article must be “an”.</p> <p>If you are not sure whether you should use the indefinite article, consider whether the reader knows the answer to the following question: <i>What study?</i> If the reader does not know the answer, then you should use the indefinite article.</p>

When is it wrong to use an Article?

1. When discussing **abstract nouns**, or when using **uncountable nouns** to discuss general ideas:

- ✗ **Incorrect:** *The freedom and the love are equally important in culture.*
- ✓ **Correct:** *Freedom and love are equally important in culture* (i.e. the sentence is using “freedom” and “love” as abstract nouns, which refer to concepts, emotions, or qualities, and which only take an article if a particular context has been specified).

- ✗ **Incorrect:** *The education cultivates lifelong critical thinking.*
- ✓ **Correct:** *Education cultivates lifelong critical thinking* (i.e. the sentence is referring to “education” as general concept, rather than referring to a specific kind of education).

- ✗ **Incorrect:** *With the deadline approaching, I was running out of the time.*
- ✓ **Correct:** *With the deadline approaching, I was running out of time* (i.e. the sentence is referring to “time” in a general sense, rather than referring to an exact/ known time). Note that this sentence correctly uses “the deadline”, which assumes that the noun is already known to the reader.

2. When discussing **plural nouns** in a general sense, or when referring to general **categories**:

- ✗ **Incorrect:** *The rats were often used in scientific experiments.*
- ✓ **Correct:** *Rats were often used in scientific experiments* (i.e. the sentence is referring to “rats” in a general sense, rather than a specific/known group of rats).

- ✗ **Incorrect:** *The fictional books can provide alternative perspectives on important topics and social issues.*
- ✓ **Correct:** *Fictional books can provide alternative perspectives on important topics and social issues* (i.e. the sentence is referring to “books” as a general category, rather than a specific/known collection of books).

3. When discussing **proper nouns** (names of people, places, and titles) or **languages**:

- ✗ **Incorrect:** *I travelled to the Paris with the Martha, who loves both the France and all of the Europe.*
- ✓ **Correct:** *I travelled to Paris with Martha, who loves both France and all of Europe* (i.e. proper nouns like “Martha”, “Paris”, “France”, and “Europe” do not take an article).
Exceptions to this rule are:
 - Places with plural names (“The Netherlands”, “The United Arab Emirates”, and “The United States of America”).
 - Specific geographical features (“The Sahara Desert”, “The Amazon Rainforest”, or “The Himalayas”).
 - When place names become adjectives that stress something specific about the noun (“the European landscape”, “the French cuisine”).

- ✗ **Incorrect:** *The English is the most widely-spoken language in Ireland.*
- ✓ **Correct:** *English is the most widely-spoken language in Ireland* (i.e. languages do not require an article).