

***BASIC RULES***  
***OF***  
***THE ARTICLES***

After **the** long day, **the** cup of tea tastes particularly good.

After **a** long day, **a** cup of tea tastes particularly good.

What is an article?

How many articles are in the English language?

What is the meaning of the articles?

An **article** is a word used to modify a **noun**, which is a person, place, object or idea. Technically, an article is a special part of speech, which modifies a noun. Articles are used to point out or refer to nouns. There are two different types of articles that we use in writing and conversation to point out or refer to a noun or group of nouns: **definite** and **indefinite** articles. We can sometimes deal with a meaningful absence of the article, called **zero article**.

## Two basic rules

To say “You know which I mean”, we put ***the*** before a noun.

I’ve been to **the doctor**. (You know which one: my doctor.)

Have you fed **the dogs**? (You know which ones I mean.)

Could you pass **the salt**? (You can see the salt that I want.)

When we can’t say “You know which I mean”, we:

–put *a/an* before a singular countable noun

There’s **a rat** in the kitchen! I need **an envelope**.

–put no article with a plural or uncountable noun.

She’s afraid of **rats**. I need **help**.

Are you saying  
"You know which I mean?"

YES

NO

**THE**

I've been to **the doctor**.  
Have you fed **the dogs**?  
Could you pass **the salt**.

singular countable noun

**A/AN**

There's **a rat** in the kitchen.  
I need **an envelope**.

plural noun

uncountable noun

**NO ARTICLE**

She's afraid of **rats**.  
I need **help**.



I often think about ..... dog.



I often think about ..... dog



*I often speak about ..... world.*



## Four common mistakes to avoid

1. Don't use **a/an** with plural or uncountable nouns.

John collects **stamps**. (NOT... a stamps.)

Our garden needs **water**. (NOT... a water.)

2. Don't use **the** to talk about things in general. The does not mean "all".

**Elephants** can swim very well. (NOT The elephants can swim...)

**Petrol** is expensive. (NOT The petrol...)

3. Don't use articles together with my, this, or other determiners.

**my work** (NOT the my work)

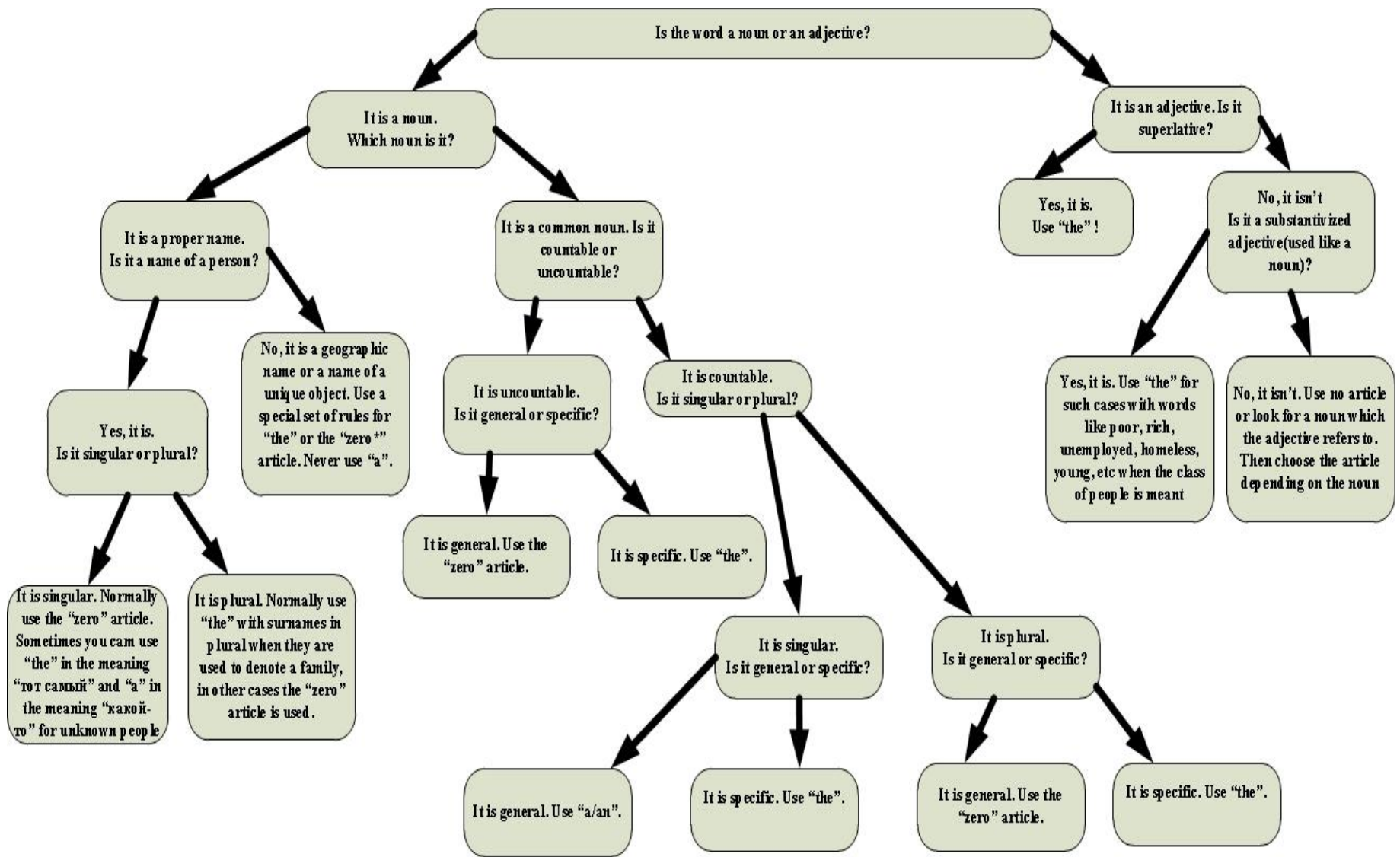
**this problem** (NOT the this problem)

**a friend** of mine (NOT a my friend)

4. Don't use singular countable nouns alone, without an article or other determiner. We can say a cat, the cat, my cat, this cat, any cat, either cat or every cat, but not just cat.

Give it to **the cat**. (NOT Give it to cat.)

Annie is **a doctor**. (NOT Annie is doctor.)



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\* The term zero article means that no article is used, but this absence of the article is meaningful. For instance, it shows that the noun is non-specific and general when it is plural.

**Fill in a, an, one or ones.**

1. I'm making ... sandwich. Would you like .....
2. There was only ..... sandwich left. All the others had been eaten.
3. We saw ..... giraffe and ..... alligator at the zoo.
4. These biscuits are nicer than the ..... I normally buy.
5. She paid ..... thousand pounds for her car.
6. .... day, I will buy a house of my own.
7. I'd love ..... car like that ..... over there.
8. .... of my brothers is ..... policeman.
9. I'm looking for ..... dress. I'd like a blue .....
10. I heard ..... amusing joke yesterday.
11. I like these three pairs of trousers. Which ..... do you like best?
12. Simon enjoys swimming. He goes to his local pool three times ..... week.
13. .... Mr. Green came to see you. He's waiting in your office.
14. We had ..... exciting holiday. It was better than the ..... we had last year.

Choose the correct alternative.

1. Catherine loves **cats/the cats**.
2. Look at **cats/the cats**! They are chasing a bird.
3. I don't like **coffee/the coffee**, but I like **tea/the tea**.
4. You cut **cake/the cake** and I'll pour **coffee/the coffee**.
5. **Life/The life** will be very different in the future.
6. **Life/The life** of a mayfly is extremely short.
7. I enjoy **swimming/the swimming** in the sea.
8. **Children/The children** usually like playing games.
9. **Children/The children** have gone to the park.
10. All **people/the people** in this room are my relatives

Choose the correct alternative.

11. All **people/the people** should have freedom of speech.
12. **Villages/The villages** in this part of the country are very beautiful.
13. **Breakfast/The breakfast** is the most important meal of **day/the day**.
14. Paul was **only/the only** person who remembered me.
15. In **Stone Age/the Stone Age**, people lived in caves.
16. I would like to travel to **Spain/the Spain**.
17. We travelled to London by **train/the train**.
18. He is learning to play **flute/the flute**.

**Fill in the gaps with a, an, the, or –.**

1. A: Have you got ..... car?

B: Yes, I bought ..... second-hand one last winter.

2. A: How often do you take ..... holiday?

B: I go to my house in ..... country about twice ..... year.

3. A: I can't find ..... shoes I wanted to wear for my party.

B: Have you looked in ..... cupboard in ..... hall?

4. A: Did you have fun at ..... theatre last night?

B: Yes, it was ..... enjoyable evening and ..... play was great.

5. A: That's ..... interesting painting.

B: I know. I found it in ..... attic.