

Copy Editing in Medical Journalism

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The Use of Articles

- ▶ in English Papers



1.1. The Use of Article (A, An)

- ▶ In English, there are 4 articles: a/an/the/∅.

A/An

We use a/an:

- **The first time you mention or refer to a noun**
 - Example: I bought a new pair of shoes yesterday! (First mention). Can you believe the shoes were 50% off!! (Second mention – now it is clear which shoes: the shoes you bought yesterday.)



1.1. The Use of Article (A, An) (cont)

- **To name a member of a group**
 - Jobs (I'm a teacher.)
 - Nationalities (He's an American.)
 - Religions (She's a Buddhist.)
- **When you also mean "one"**
 - Example: I had an (=one) apple at lunch.



1.1. The Use of Article (A, An) (cont)

- **Expressions that quantify**

- A little (bit) of
- A lot of
- A ton of
- a is used before:
 1. All consonants (but see Rule 8 below).
 2. U when the sound is like you (e.g. university, unique).
 3. Eu (but not in acronyms).
 4. One.
 5. H, except for the words listed in Rule 8 below. an is used before:



1.1. The Use of Article (A, An) (cont)

- 6. A, e (but not eu) i, and o.
- 7. U when the sound is like the u in understanding, unpredictable.
- 8. Hour, honor, heir, honest and their derivatives, and herb / herbicide (US English). an is not used before other words that begin with H, unless the H appears in an acronym. Note: both a and an are commonly used before historical.
- Use a before the following letters in acronyms: B, C, D, G, J, K, P, Q, T, U, V, W, Y, Z.
- 2. Use an before the following letters in acronyms: A, E, F, H, I, L, M, N, O, R, S, X.



1.1. The Use of Article (A, An) (cont)

- ▶ *a* versus *an*: use with acronyms, digits, and symbols
- ▶ 1. Use *a* before the following letters in acronyms: B, C, D, G, J, K, P, Q, T, U, V, W, Y, Z.
- ▶ 2. Use *an* before the following letters in acronyms: A, E, F, H, I, L, M, N, O, R, S, X.
- ▶ 3. Sometimes acronyms are read as words (e.g. NATO, URL, PIN, UNICEF)
- ▶ rather than letter by letter (e.g. EU, UN, US). If they are read as words
- ▶ then the normal rules for *a* / *an* apply. If they are read as letters, then
- ▶ rules 1 and 2 apply.



1.1. The Use of Article (A, An) (cont)

- ▶ 4. When deciding between *a* or *an* before a number written in figures
 - ▶ (e.g. *a 100 kilowatt battery*) say the word out loud in your head and
 - ▶ follow the normal rules (e.g. *a one hundred kilowatt battery* follows Rule 4 in the previous subsection, *an eight kilowatt battery* follows Rule 7).
- ▶ 5. Before symbols and Greek letters decide whether the word that
 - ▶ the symbol or letter represents would be used with *a* or *an*,
 - ▶ following the rule of the previous subsection.



1.1. The Use of Article (A, An) (cont)

- ▶ 4 *a / an* versus *the*: generic versus specific
- ▶ 1. Use *a / an* first time you mention something.
 - ▶ This paper presents a new system for modeling 4D maps.
 - ▶ This paper presents a new system for modeling 4D maps. The system is based on ...
- ▶ 2. Use *the* on subsequent occasions (i.e. when the reader / listener already knows what you are talking about).



1.1. The Use of Article (A, An) (cont)

- ▶ 3. Use *a / an* to refer to something generic, *the* to something specific
- ▶ or something which the reader will already be familiar with.
- ▶ Contrary to what is currently thought, there is a growing demand for experts in this field. We need to satisfy the growing demand for experts in this field, which looks set to increase even further



1.1. The Use of Article (A, An) (cont)

▶ *a / an versus one*

▶ *one* is a number (*one, two, three*). Use *one* instead of *a / an*:

1. When it is important to specify the number.

We need one manual, not two. This parameter has a unique value

2. Before *another*.

We went from one town to another.



1.1. The Use of Article (A, An) (cont)

- ▶ 3. Before *way* when not preceded by an adjective.

One way to do this is to....

A novel way to do this is to

- ▶ 4. In expressions of this type: *one day next week*.

We could have the meeting one
day next month.

A good day to meet would be
Tuesday.



1.2. The Use of Article (The)

The

We use the:

With something already mentioned (see example for the first mention with a/an above)

- **When there is just one of something***
 - I took a walk in the forest. (There is only one forest where you live.)
- **When you define a specific person, object or place**
 - I loved the book my dad gave me for my birthday. (Not just any book, but specifically the books your dad gave you for your birthday.)

1.2. The Use of Article (The) (cont)

- **With things that are unique (there is only one)***
 - The sun
 - The President of the U.S.
 - The CEO of Apple
- **With ordinal numbers and superlatives**
 - The first, the second, the third
- ▶ The biggest, the best, the fastest, the ugliest



1.2. The Use of Article (The) (cont)

- **With some proper nouns:**
 - Rivers (The Nile)
 - Mountains Ranges (The Rockies, The Alps)
 - Oceans (The Pacific Ocean)
 - Groups of Islands or Countries with Plural
 - The Hawaiian Islands
 - The Netherlands
- ▶ *When there is just one of something or when something is unique, then the information is shared information. This means everyone already knows about the person/place/thing so we don't have to explain it or define it. For example, everyone around the world knows about the sun. We don't have to explain the sun, so we always use the sun (not a sun)

