

So you've come across a noun... Do you use A, An, The, or No Article?

If it's a proper noun -- is it singular or plural?

Proper nouns are used for specific people, places, or things.

Proper + singular

Often used without an article
(e.g., They were happy to visit Santa Clara University. SCU is in California. We met at Benson Memorial Union.)

Proper + plural

Often used with "the"
(e.g., the Broncos; the Jesuits; the Tuskegee Airmen; the Academy Awards)

If it's a common noun -- is it unspecific or specific?

A common noun is not used for a specific person, place, or thing and does not require capitalization.
(e.g., professor, assignment, education)

If the noun is unspecific, is it uncountable or countable?

Unspecific + uncountable

No article
(e.g., advice; homework; research)

Unspecific + countable

Often with an article
(e.g., the road(s); an apple; a lab report; the film(s))

Unspecific + countable + singular

Often used with "a" or "an"
(e.g., a professor; a paper; an essay)

Unspecific + countable + plural

Generally no article
(e.g., We use computers daily. People are always looking at screens. They traveled many roads.)

Common + specific

Common + specific = definite article "the"

(e.g., We have tickets to the game. I need to pick up the new textbook for my class at the bookstore.)

Reminders:

- Specific, singular, countable nouns should always take an article or another determiner (e.g., our, their, my).
- Nouns that have been made more specific via modifiers will take the definite article (e.g., the left arm of the patient; the trip of a lifetime; the hopes of many).