QUICK GUIDE: THE USE OF ARTICLES

Singular Noun

Countable?
- Specific?
  - the
- General?
  - a/an

Uncountable?
- Specific?
  - the
- General?
  - Ø

Plural Noun

Specific?
- the
- Ø

Proper Noun

Specific?
- the
- Ø

“Specific” (or definite) = known to both: Writer and Reader
OR
Speaker and Listener
UNDERSTANDING THE QUICK GUIDE TO ARTICLES

COUNTABLE/UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS

Nouns can generally be divided into either countable or uncountable. Countable nouns can be either singular or plural. In a language learner’s dictionary, they are usually marked as [C]. Examples of countable nouns include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular form</th>
<th>Plural form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pen</td>
<td>pens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>child</td>
<td>children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expense</td>
<td>expenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>certainty</td>
<td>certainties</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Uncountable nouns do not have singular or plural forms. In a language learner’s dictionary, they are usually marked as [U]. An example of an uncountable noun is the word rice: although rice grains are countable, we cannot talk about rices. Other examples of uncountable nouns include:

| wisdom | chaos | anger | oxygen | peace |

Some nouns, however, can be both countable and uncountable, depending on the context. Some of these nouns include:

**Hope**
We live in hope of a better tomorrow.
She shared her hopes for the future.

**Childhood**
Childhood should be a happy time for everyone.
Hannah’s childhood was a happy one.

**Hair**
Ivan has thick black hair.
Recently, he has noticed a few grey hairs.

**Man**
Man is master of the universe.
The men liked to sit separately after dinner.
SPECIFIC/GENERAL (ARTICLES)

In determining which, if any, article should be used, you need to ask the question:
Am I referring to something specific or general?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>General</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(refers to a specific member/s of a group)</td>
<td>(refers to all members of a group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The students</strong> were working hard for their exams.</td>
<td><strong>Students</strong> have a reputation for playing hard and studying only when necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I couldn’t get the car</em> to start.</td>
<td><strong>A car is</strong> a necessary part of modern life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PROPER NOUNS

A proper noun is the name of a person or a particular thing. Proper nouns are usually written with a capital letter.

Generally, the definite article (the) is not used with most singular proper nouns; for example, you would not refer to your friend Anna as “the Anna”. We do, however, use the definite article for proper nouns in the plural form: we would refer to Anna’s family as the Wilsons. Other examples include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>The United States of America</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>The Bahamas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Mount)</em> Everest</td>
<td>The Himalayas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto Island</td>
<td>The Thousand Islands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are exceptions to the above; it is advisable that you memorize whether or not the proper nouns you use regularly need the definite article.