



# WRITING CENTRE

There are only three articles; a, an and the. These are three of the most basic words in English but they follow an extremely complicated set of rules.

Here are three of the most important rules that govern the use of these words.

## RULE 1

Indefinite articles are used for previously unknown nouns that are being introduced into a dialogue or story and definite articles are used for nouns that have already been introduced (or are already known or are assumed to be known at the point of introduction to the conversation).

*I saw **a** cat. **The** cat was sitting in **an** office. **The** office was in **a** university. **The** cat ran out of **the** university when it saw **a** mouse. **The** mouse ran into **a** hole when it saw **the** cat so **the** cat didn't catch **the** mouse.*

## RULE 2

When a noun is unique, use a definite article.

- *He is **the** president of Korea.*
- *She's **the** owner of the company.*
- *He's **the** mayor.*
- *It's **the** sun.*

The above sentences can be contrasted with:

- *He's **a** member of parliament.*
- *She's **an** accountant.*
- *He is **a** plumber.*
- *It's **a** planet.*

Uniqueness can come by association: *A **car** crashed into **a** tree. **The** driver was seriously injured.*

Superlatives are usually unique: ***the** best place, **the** worst thing, **the** fastest runner, **the** tallest mountain.*

This rule is usually used in ordering things by number: ***the** second time, **the** third example, **the** fourth person to call.*

This exception applies to some named things (which through naming become unique): ***The** Alps, **The** Vancouver Canucks, **The** Amazon River, **The** Pacific Ocean.*

### **RULE 3**

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When we are speaking of a noun in general we usually leave the article out and, if it is countable, use the plural form.

When we are talking about an actual car or cars that really exist or existed we use an article (definite or indefinite). In the following examples, we are speaking of specific/actual/real cars.

- *I drive **a** car.*
- ***The** car was in need of repair.*
- ***The** cars are in the parking lot.*

However, we can also make general statements about cars. When we do speak in general of cars, we leave the articles out.

- *I'm interested in cars.*
- *Cars are extremely expensive.*
- *In the future, there will be cars that can fly.*