THE ACADEMIC SUPPORT CENTER

USING ARTICLES CORRECTLY

In English, most nouns need articles. Articles are **definite (*the*)** or **indefinite (*a* or *an*).**

The definite article is used before a specific, known noun. The noun can be singular or plural:

The car she drives is blue.

The cars they sell are expensive.

Note: The *e* in the word *the* is pronounced as a schwa (upside down *e, or "uh"* sound*)* before words that start with a consonant sound and as a long *e* before words that start with a vowel sound:

the car – Pronounced as "uh" in <u>a</u>lone.

the apple – Pronounced as long e, as in <u>ea</u>t

An indefinite article is used before a general, unknown noun. Because a or an means one, the noun is always singular:

A car is a very expensive purchase.

An apple a day keeps the doctor away.

Note: The form of *a* or *an* changes before words that start with a consonant sound or a vowel sound. Use *a* before words that start with a consonant; use *an* before words that start with a vowel sound.

Note: Modifiers are placed between the article and the noun and determine whether *a* or *an* is used.

An <u>expensive</u> car should be a nice car.

A <u>ripe</u> apple a day will keep the doctor away.

DECIDING WHEN TO USE ARTICLES

To decide if a noun needs an article, first use the following definitions to decide what type of noun it is. Then use the information that follows to help you decide if you need an article.

Proper nouns: The formal name of a person, place, or thing (John Smith, Miami, the Bible).

Proper nouns may be formed from common nouns (the United States, the Bill of Rights).

Common nouns: All nouns other than proper nouns. Common nouns can be count, noncount or abstract nouns.

Count nouns are common nouns that can be counted (two cars, one dog, ten people).

Noncount nouns are common nouns that cannot be counted (water, sugar, flour).

Abstract nouns are common nouns that represent an idea (love, honor, pride).

<u>**Need Articles**</u>
Count nouns, singular:
The car she bought is blue**.**
A car is expensive.

Count nouns, plural definite:
The cars they sell are cheap.

Noncount nouns, definite:
The water is cold.

Abstract nouns, definite:
He was the love of her life.

Proper nouns made from common nouns:
the United States, the Atlantic Ocean

<u>**Do not Need Articles**</u>
Nouns preceded by pronouns:
His car is blue.
Those cars are expensive.

Count nouns, plural indefinite:
Cars are expensive.

Noncount nouns, indefinite:
Water is essential for life.

Abstract nouns, indefinite:
Love is blind.

Proper nouns not used as common:
George, Florida

<u>Pronouns can replace the need for an article:</u>

Possessive Pronoun: My car is expensive.
Their car is cheap.

Indefinite Pronoun: Any car is expensive.
Some cars are cheap.

Demonstrative pronoun: This car is expensive.
That car is cheap**.**

Interrogative Pronoun: Which car is expensive?
Whose car is cheap?

Relative Pronoun: I know which car was stolen.
I know whose car was wrecked.