**A, An or The?**

When do we say "**the** dog" and when do we say "**a** dog"? (On this page we talk only about singular, countable nouns.)

**The** and **a/an** are called "articles". We divide them into "definite" and "indefinite" like this:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Articles | |
| **Definite** | **Indefinite** |
| the | a, an |

We use "definite" to mean sure, certain. "Definite" is particular.

We use "indefinite" to mean not sure, not certain. "Indefinite" is general.

When we are talking about one thing in particular, we use **the**. When we are talking about one thing in general, we use **a** or **an**.

Think of the sky at night. In the sky we see 1 moon and millions of stars. So normally we would say:

* I saw **the** moon last night.
* I saw **a** star last night.

Look at these examples:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **the** | **a, an** |
| * **The** capital of France is Paris. * I have found **the** book that I lost. * Have you cleaned **the** car? * There are six eggs in **the** fridge. * Please switch off **the** TV when you finish. | * I was born in **a** town. * John had **an** omelette for lunch. * James Bond ordered **a** drink. * We want to buy **an** umbrella. * Have you got **a** pen? |

Of course, often we can use **the** or **a/an** for the same word. It depends on the situation, not the word. Look at these examples:

* We want to buy **an** umbrella. (Any umbrella, not a particular umbrella.)
* Where is **the** umbrella? (We already have an umbrella. We are looking for our umbrella, a particular umbrella.)

This little story should help you understand the difference between **the** and **a, an**:  
  
**A** man and **a** woman were walking in Oxford Street. **The** woman saw **a** dress that she liked in **a** shop. She asked **the** man if he could buy **the** dress for her. He said: "Do you think **the** shop will accept **a** cheque? I don't have **a** credit card."