ARTICLES

**Proper nouns** name specific persons or places and begin with capital letters (Walter, Mrs. Grundy, London). Titles of books or movies (*Pride and Prejudice, Gone With the Wind*) are treated as proper nouns as well. All other nouns are **common nouns**, of which there are two kinds: **count and noncount nouns**.

**Count nouns** refer to things that can be separated into individual units and thus counted: *one house / two houses; one train / seven trains*. Count nouns have plurals and usually refer to things that can be seen, heard, smelled, touched, tasted, or smelled.

**Noncount nouns** refer to things that cannot be counted (*oil, milk, gas*); many of these are abstractions (*patience, advice*); many foods are noncount nouns (*milk, pasta, bread, wine*). Noncount nouns do not have plurals; many have a collective meaning (furniture, clothing). If you want to give an amount of a noncount noun, use a count noun first: *a quart of milk, a gallon of gas*.

Some nouns can be used as both count and noncount nouns, but their meaning changes: if they are used as count nouns, they refer to something specific; if they are used as noncount nouns, their meaning is general.

- *The exercises* were difficult to do. (count; specific)
- *Exercise* will keep you healthy. (noncount; general)
- *There were bright lights in the sky.* (count; specific)
- *Those plants need more light.* (noncount; general)

**Singular count nouns need an article.** Use the (definite article) if you are talking about a specific person or thing.

*The old man inside the deli will take care of the ruckus.*

**Use a/an (indefinite article) if you are talking about a non-specific person or thing.** *A* precedes consonants (*a dish, a house*); *an* precedes vowels or letters pronounced as *vowels* (*an apple, an evening, an honorable woman*).

*Asher wants to buy a car and marry an honest girl.*
*Jacob took the bus to school rather than waiting for Mother to find a parking spot nearby.*
*Jacob arrived at the baseball game in a beat-up Chevy.*

**Plural count nouns do not need articles.**
*Baseball cards have sleeves; comic books have safe rooms.*

**Noncount nouns do not usually need an article.**
*Jacob does not really like chicken.*
*Asher needed light in the garage.*

**However, if noncount nouns have modifiers (words or word groups that describe the nouns and thus make them more specific), they take a definite article (**the**).**
*The chicken Mother bought last week has already turned a horrible color.*
*Asher never gets tired of looking at the dim light in the garage.*

▶Did you like the sample sentences? Get the whole story in Joshua Braff’s *The Unthinkable Thoughts of Jacob Green*. 