

# Article Charts for ESL Students

The following is excerpted from *The Writing Process: A Guide for ESL Students. A Workbook to Accompany "The Longman Concise Handbook for Writers."* It has been adapted slightly to meet accessibility needs.

## Rules for Use of Articles with Common Nouns

In the preceding section, you learned three distinctions for common nouns:

1. Countable versus noncountable.
2. Singular versus plural.
3. Definite, generic, or indefinite.

Now that you understand these distinctions, look at the rules for usage of articles with common nouns in the chart below.

Rule	Example
Always use an article with singular countable nouns.	Tomorrow he is going to look at <b>a used car</b> .
Use the article <i>a</i> or <i>an</i> with singular countable nouns that are definite.	Tranh has to buy <b>a car</b> to drive to work on Monday.
Use the article <i>the</i> with singular countable nouns that are definite.	<b>The building</b> where he works is not located near a bus line.
Use the article <i>the</i> with definite plural nouns.	He looked at <b>the cars</b> that Jan had recommended.
Use the determiner <i>some</i> or no article at all with indefinite plural nouns.	There must be <b>some cars</b> for sale under \$6,000.
Do not use an article with generic plural nouns.	<b>Car dealers</b> expect <b>customers</b> to bargain with them.
Use the article <i>the</i> with definite noncountable nouns.	Tranh was aware of <i>the reputation</i> of car dealers for driving hard bargains.
Use the determiner <i>some</i> or no article at all with indefinite noncountable nouns.	Tranh experienced <i>some nervousness</i> when the dealer started pressuring him to sign a contract.
Use no article with generic noncountable nouns.	The dealer assured Tranh that <i>nervousness</i> was a normal reaction

## Exceptions to the Rules for Articles with Common Nouns

The box presents rules for article use with common nouns, but there are many exceptions, especially in the following areas.

## Diseases

Diseases use articles in unpredictable ways. Those with formal names (*pneumonia, AIDS, influenza*) are frequently referred to by the singular noun and no article. Those with more informal names sometimes take *the* (*the flu, the plague*) and sometimes take *a* or *an* (*a cold, an earache*). Those with informal names and plural forms can often be used with no article (*measles* or *the measles; chicken pox* or *the chicken pox*). Note also that names of diseases are not capitalized.

## More Exceptions to the Rules for Articles with Common Nouns

*Names of nations*  
the Ivory Coast, the Sudan  
(*countries named for regions*)\*  
the Republic of China (*republics*)

*Empires and dynasties*  
the Roman Empire  
the Ching Dynasty

*Organizations*  
the Red Cross  
the American Association for Retired People  
the National Honor Society

*Geographic areas*  
the American South  
(*regions*)

the Mojave (deserts)  
the Iberian Peninsula  
the Pacific Ocean  
the Sargasso Sea  
the Gulf of Mexico  
the Yellow River  
the Panama Canal  
the North Channel  
(*but Cape Cod, Point Barro, Biscayne Bay*)

*Museums and libraries*  
the Louvre  
the Library of Congress

*Languages*  
the English language  
(*but not the English*)  
*Colleges and universities*  
the University of Hawaii, the University of Colorado  
(*but Hawaii State University, Colorado State University*)

*Historical periods and events*  
the Great Depression  
the Holocaust  
the Mesozoic Era

\*Country names that are grammatically plural (*the United States, the Netherlands, the Philippines*) follow rule 3 for plural proper nouns, even though they are construed as singular: *The Netherlands lies entirely below sea level.*

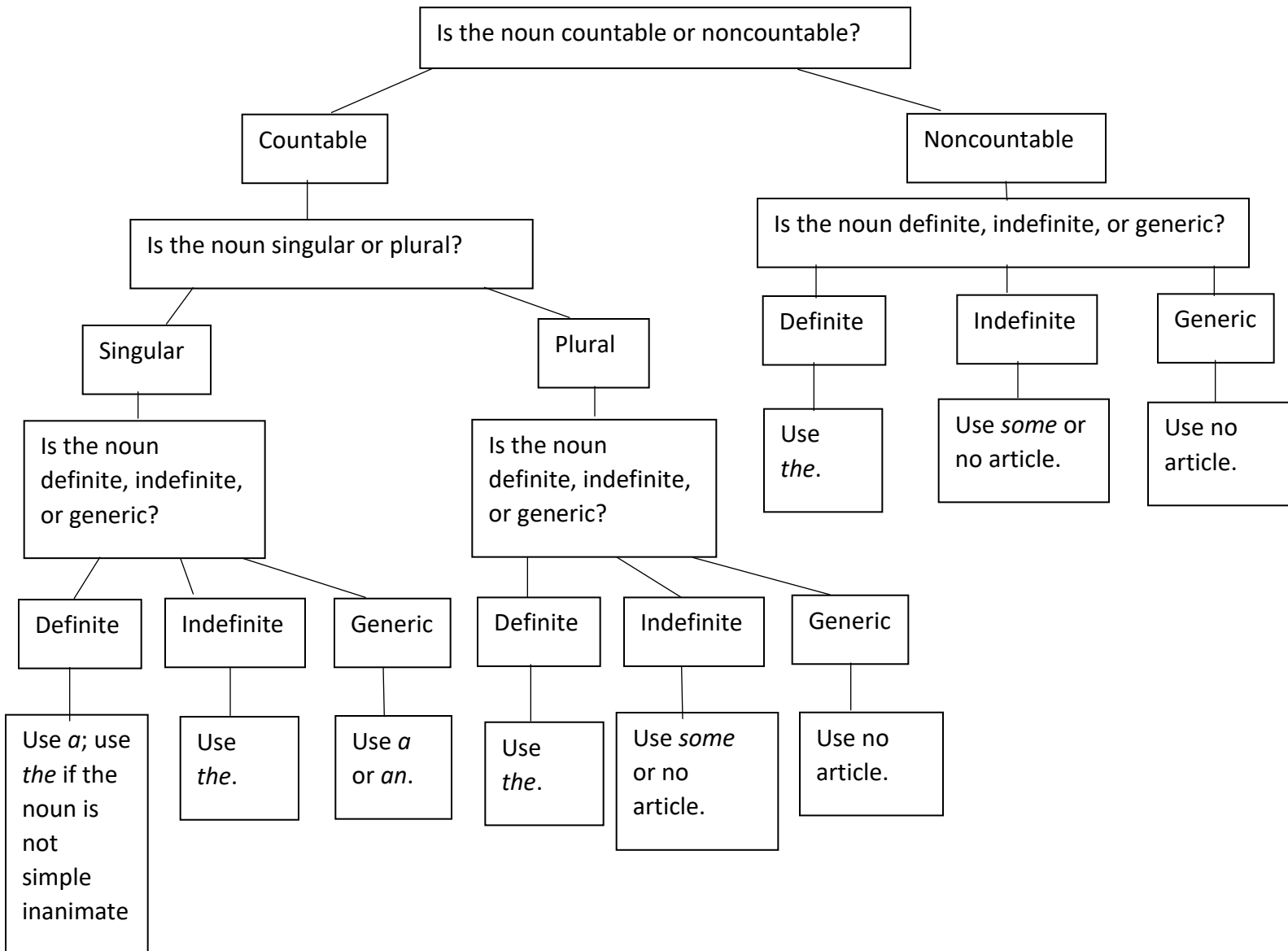
## Exercise: Using Articles with Proper Nouns

Fill in the blank with the correct article. Write a short dash if no article is needed.

Example: \_\_\_\_\_ The \_\_\_\_\_ University of California is located in \_\_\_\_\_ Los Angeles.

1. \_\_\_\_ Charles Darwin proposed his theory of speciation by observing \_\_\_\_ Galapagos Islands.
2. \_\_\_\_ Minneapolis Institute of Art recently acquired a famous Monet painting.
3. The end of communism in \_\_\_\_ Czech Republic and \_\_\_\_ Slovakia is referred to as \_\_\_\_ Velvet Revolution.
4. \_\_\_\_ Mount McKinley, part of \_\_\_\_ Alaska Range, is the tallest mountain in \_\_\_\_ North America.
5. Notre-Dame is a good example of Gothic Architecture in \_\_\_\_ Middle Ages.
6. One of the largest deserts in the world is \_\_\_\_ Sahara.

### Chart 3: Selecting Articles with Common Nouns



## References Consulted

1. Tickle, Amy. *The Writing Process: A Guide for ESL Students. A Workbook to Accompany "The Longman Concise Handbook for Writers."* 1st ed., Longman, Inc, 1996.