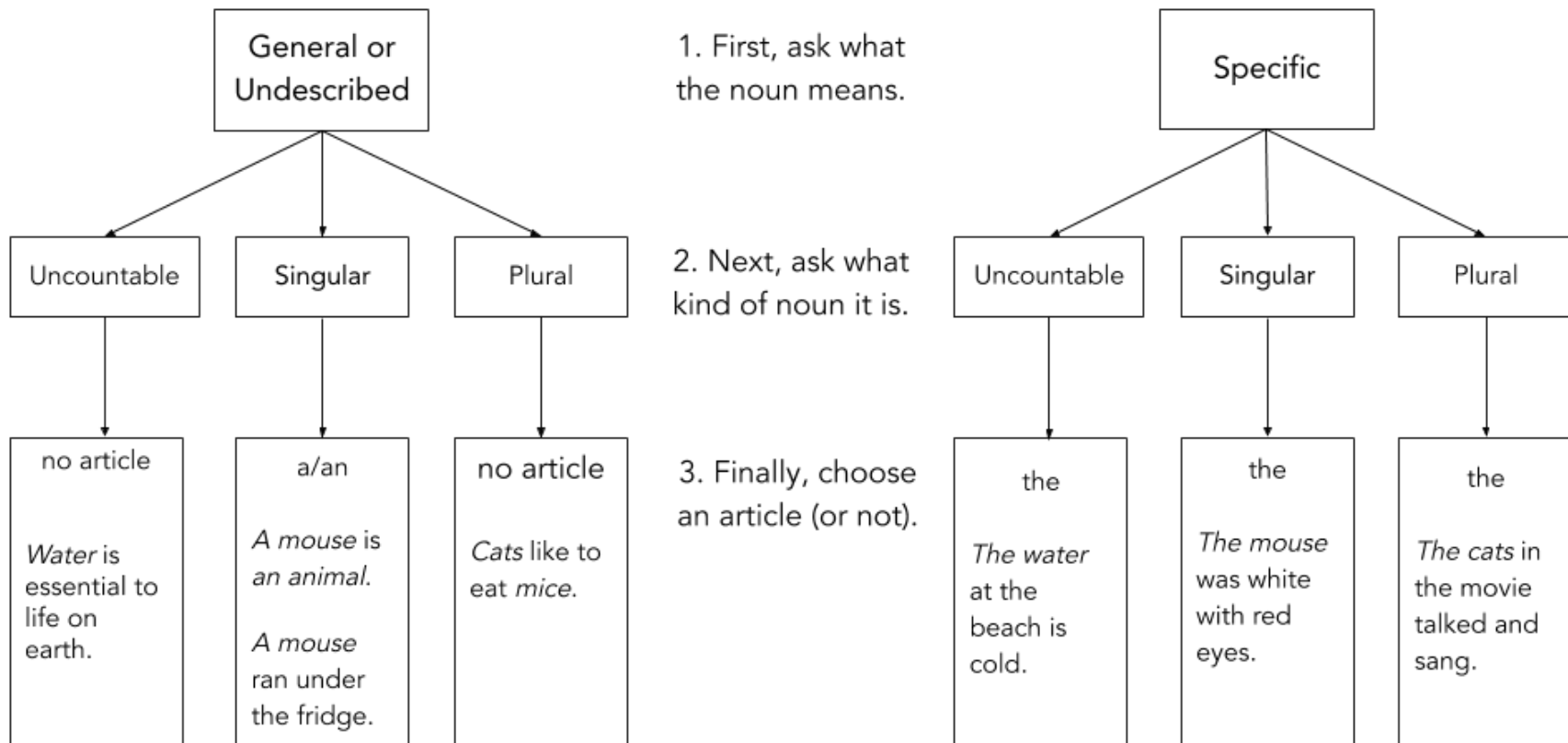


## Articles

In English, articles (the, a/an, no article) are important in clarifying the meaning of a noun. Articles can be particularly challenging for English Language Learners, as other languages have different rules for articles or don't have any articles at all. This is a general guide for when to use which articles; however, there are exceptions to the rules, and sometimes personal choice plays a role. See the reverse side of this handout for further explanation and details.



### General versus Specific

General (or Undescribed) nouns may refer to everything, all of something, or to something that the reader has no previous knowledge of and is not described in specific detail (example: *A mouse* ran under the fridge.).

Specific nouns refer to something described or that the reader has previous knowledge of. Keep in mind that once you mention something in a text (*A mouse* ran under the fridge.), the reader now has previous knowledge of it, making it specific and therefore requiring the article "the" the next time it is mentioned (*The mouse* stayed under the fridge to hide from the cat.).

### Uncountable versus Countable (Singular/Plural)

Uncountable (or "noncount") nouns cannot be counted because they are seen as indivisible wholes (milk, furniture, education) and are often abstract ideas (love, anger, freedom).

Countable (or "count") nouns can be counted and can be either singular (only one) or plural (more than one). Plural nouns usually add -s or -es to the end of the noun, but there are many nouns that have irregular plural forms (one mouse, many mice).

Some nouns can be both uncountable and countable depending on the context.

Example: *Light* was shining on the tree. (*uncountable*)  
*Lights* were shining on the tree. (*countable*)

### Other Article "Rules"

- Use no article with people's names, languages, sports/games, and academic subjects.
  - We talked to *John* and *Jane* about their plans for the holidays.
  - She knows how to speak *English*, *Spanish*, and *Chinese*.
  - The kids are playing *football* in the yard.
  - This quarter I'm taking *math*, *English*, and *music*.
- Use "the" when there is only one of something.
  - *The President* vetoed the bill.
  - Looking directly at *the sun* will damage your eyes.
- Countries usually use no article, but if it includes "united," "union," or "republic" it will use "the."
  - China, Brazil, Japan
  - The United States, The Soviet Union, The Republic of the Philippines
- Use "a" when the noun starts with a consonant and "an" when it starts with a vowel

In many cases, article use is dictated by rules, but there are times when article use is discretionary and depends on the meaning you're trying to convey. For example, using "the" can sometimes emphasize a noun's importance. Pay attention to how others use articles and the effect it has on the emphasis and meaning of what is being communicated.