USING AN ARTICLES CHART with COMMON NOUNS
Common nouns sometimes need an article. Along with our quicktip, “Articles: Choosing a/an, the, or nothing (∅) with common nouns,” this chart may provide a convenient way for you to more methodically—and successfully—use articles with common nouns in your own writing.

GLOSSARY

**common noun**
a word that represents a person, place, or thing but is not the name of that person, place, or thing

**unspecific noun**
a person, place, or thing that does not have a unique identity or is being mentioned for the first time in a text

**specific noun**
a person, place, or thing that has a defined identity—e.g., it has already been mentioned in the text; it is followed by modifying information that makes it specific; it is unique; and so on

**countable noun**
a person, place, or thing that can be marked as either singular or plural

**uncountable noun**
a person, place, or thing that can only be marked as singular, not plural

For additional examples and information, see a grammar book designed for non-native speakers of English.

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**RULE 1**
Unspecific, countable, singular nouns are preceded by a or an.

**RULE 2**
Unspecific, countable, plural nouns are not preceded by an article.

**RULE 3**
Unspecific, uncountable nouns are not preceded by an article.

**RULE 4**
Specific nouns are preceded by the.

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**EXAMPLES**

**RULE 1 EXAMPLE**
I wanted to see an academic advisor.

**RULE 2 EXAMPLE**
Laptops have become commonplace in schools.

**RULE 3 EXAMPLE**
He is seeking information about web design.

**RULE 4 EXAMPLE**
She enrolled in the nearest community college.

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Chart adapted from materials created by Sheryl Holt, Coordinator, First-Year Writing (Non-Native Speaker Sections)