

Rules for the use and omission of articles

Articles are often misused. The overuse and misuse of articles will cause ungrammaticality. Nonetheless, most article errors are not serious. Even if you omit all the articles, you will still be able to convey the meaning. Still, students should learn the correct use of articles. Article errors can lower your scores in tests like TOEFL and IELTS in addition to making your writing look unprofessional.

If you don't know how to use articles, you should consult a good grammar book. My attempt to make these rules as simple for ESL students as possible runs as follows:

Is it a proper or a common noun? A proper noun does not take an article. Examples are: John, Paris and English. A singular common noun always needs an article or another determiner with it. We can say a boy, this boy or my boy. But we cannot say just boy.

Remember that a noun can be proper in one sentence and common in another sentence; so, it is useless to label a particular noun 'proper' or 'common'.

If the common noun is not the name of one particular person or thing, it requires the indefinite article 'a' when the noun is singular. When the noun is plural, 'a' is never used and usually no article is required.

There are several phrases, most of them prepositional, in which nouns, usually common, must be used without articles. Examples are: in view of (NOT in the view of), on condition that (NOT on the condition that) etc.