Special Topic I
Articles

Example 1

(a) The apple in my hand is red.

(b) An apple in my hand is red.

(c) Apple in my hand is red.

Only one is feasible:

(a) The apple in my hand is red.

(Implication: There is one apple in my hand.)

(b) An apple in my hand is red.

(Implication: There is more than one apple in my hand, but just one apple is red.)

(c) Apple in my hand is red.

(Implication: An apple or apples have been crushed, and some of the crushed apple is red.)

Example 2

(a) My friend gave me book about Picasso.

(b) My friend gave me a book about Picasso.

(c) My friend gave me the book about Picasso.

Only (b) is feasible:

(a) My friend gave me book about Picasso.

(Impossible)

(b) My friend gave me a book about Picasso.

(Implication: There are a number of books about Picasso, and my brother gave me one of them.)

(c) My friend gave me the book about Picasso.

(Implication: There is just one book about Picasso.)

Example 3

(a) I will drink the wine with dinner.

(b) I will drink a wine with dinner.

(c) I will drink wine with dinner.

Only (c) is natural

(a) I will drink the wine with dinner.

(Most likely implication: I will drink all the wine.)

(b) I will drink a wine with dinner.

(Most likely implication: I will have one glass or one bottle of wine or perhaps one type of wine.)

(c) I will drink wine with dinner.

(Usual situation.)

What are the rules that determine article use?

Rules for Article Use

1. Countable or uncountable?

2. Specified or unspecified?

The Basic Rules

	Specified	Unspecified
Countable	The	A (or plural)
Uncoun-table	The	(nothing)

Countable vs. Uncountable

Rule: A noun is countable if and only if it possesses a boundary.

What does that mean?

We regard something as having a boundary if we can see, define or in any way imagine the limit of its extent.

More Simply

Something has a boundary if we can clearly distinguish that thing from other things.

Examples of Countable Nouns

1. An apple

2. The wine in a bottle

3. Rocks

Examples of Uncountable Nouns

1. Applesauce
2. Wine
3. Sand

Specified vs. Unspecified

A noun is specified if that to which it refers is unique.

What does that mean?

We regard a noun as specified if at the point in which it appears, the reader has sufficient information to uniquely identify it.

How do I know that?

The best way to determine whether the reader should be able to identify a unique thing to which the noun refers is to ask whether she can answer the following question:

"Which [noun]?"

Let us reconsider the examples

(a) The apple in my hand is red.

(b) An apple in my hand is red.

(c) Apple in my hand is red.

(a) My friend gave me book about Picasso.

(b) My friend gave me a book about Picasso.

(c) My friend gave me the book about Picasso.

(a) I will drink the wine with dinner.

(b) I will drink a wine with dinner.

(c) I will drink wine with dinner.

A few more difficult examples

1. We ignore *** details of *** frictional interaction.

2. This result provides us with *** understanding of *** more complicated case.

3. Thus, *** behavior derived above is described by *** following equation: A = B.

4. *** quantum mechanics continues to provide interesting philosophical puzzles.