Articles and Noun Phrases*

What is an ARTICLE?
In English, these four words—the, a, an, some—are called articles. An article joins with a noun to form a noun phrase. The article gives information about the noun phrase:
- To tell how many of the noun there are
- To indicate whether the noun is specific or general in nature
- To signal the reader that a noun is being introduced or that it has already been seen

What is a NOUN PHRASE?
A noun phrase consists of a noun and all of the words that go with it. In this sentence, the article is the and the noun is fence: The blue fence

Noun phrases can also contain numbers (twelve days), possessive nouns (Darien’s handout), possessive pronouns (my handout, their opinion), and demonstratives (this hat, that cat, these ideas, those grades), as well as descriptive modifiers (the blue fence, our ultimate destination, the laughing cow, a helpful handout).

Two types of articles, definite and indefinite:
The only definite article is the. The definite article is used for singular, plural, and uncountable nouns when the reader clearly understands which noun is being discussed.
- The man is tall.
- The sky is blue.
- The plant is dying.

The is also used when referring to ordinal numbers (the first of his name) or when naming monuments (the Lincoln Memorial) and events (the state fair).

There are three indefinite articles: a, an, and some.

A and an are used to refer to singular nouns used generically, that is, singular nouns that do not name a specific, actual thing. You will know which article to use based on the first letter (really, it’s the first sound) of the word following the article. If the first sound of the next word is a consonant, you will use a. If the first sound of the next word is a vowel, you will use an.
- A pool, a bright idea
- An owl, an eager learner, an herb garden

Some is used to refer to plural and uncountable nouns.
- Some answers, some paths
- Some soup, some water, some more salad