What are articles?
Articles are markers that identify nouns. English uses three articles: the definite article “the” and the indefinite articles “a” and “an.”

Which Article Do I Use?
1. Countable vs. Noncountable Nouns
   A and AN are used in sentences where the noun can be counted.
   - "I ran into A POST." (How many posts did you run into? Just one. Therefore, use A.)
   - "I ran into THE WATER." (How many waters did you run into? Water isn’t usually counted, so use THE.)

2. Definite vs. Indefinite Nouns
   A and AN signal that the modified noun is indefinite, that it refers to any member of a group. THE signals that the noun is definite, that it refers to a particular member of a group.
   - A dog (any dog)
   - THE dog (that specific dog)
   - A book (just any book)
   - THE book (the book that you are reading right now)
   Note: THE is also used when the noun is unique: THE Spartan Center, THE theory of relativity.

3. First vs. Subsequent Mention
   A or AN is used to introduce a noun when it is mentioned for the first time. THE is used afterward each time the noun is mentioned.
   - AN awards ceremony is held every spring to honor Northampton students, but this year interest in THE ceremony is particularly high because so many students are outstanding.
   Note: THERE IS and THERE ARE can be used to introduce an indefinite noun at the beginning of a paragraph or essay.
   - THERE IS a feeling of excitement at the beginning of each semester.

4. General vs. Specific
   A, AN, and THE can all be used to indicate that the noun is referring to the whole class to which a countable noun belongs. This use of the article is called "generic."
   - A tiger is a dangerous animal. (every tiger)
   - THE tiger is a dangerous animal. (all tigers)
   The difference between the indefinite A and AN and the generic A and AN is that the former means any one member of a class while the latter means all of the members of a class.

   Note: The omission of the article also expresses a generic (or general) meaning:
   - With a plural noun: Tigers are dangerous animals. (all tigers)
   - With a noncountable noun: Jealousy is a destructive emotion. (jealousy in general or any kind of jealousy)

When Can I Omit the Article?
Some common types of nouns that don't need an article are:
   - Names of languages: Chinese, English, French: She speaks Chinese.
   - Names of sports: basketball, volleyball, hockey: Hockey is an expensive sport.
   - Names of academic subjects: mathematics, accounting, history: Mathematics is my favorite subject.