Articles: *A, An, & The*

An article tells your reader that a noun is about to appear in a sentence. There are two kinds of articles: definite (*the*) and indefinite (*a* and *an*).

First, decide if the noun is a count or non-count noun.
A **count noun** is a noun that you can qualify with a number, like *coach* or *player*. You can have one, two, or any other number of coaches and players.
A **non-count** noun is a noun that you cannot qualify with a number, like *excitement* or *energy*. You can't have one or two excitements. Non-count nouns never take indefinite articles (*a* and *an*).

Definite Article: *the*
Use *the* before a specific object the reader is already familiar with or is about to find out about.
> The coach met with *the* team in *the* locker room before *the* big game.
Use *the* before a specific, unique object.
> Crowds flooded into *the* Chaifetz Arena to see *the* Billikens play basketball.

Common mistake—Using *the* with non-count nouns meaning "in general."
> *Incorrect*. It is fun to watch *the* basketball.
> *Correct*. It is fun to watch basketball.

Tip—The can be used with most count and non-count nouns when their identity is known to the reader.
- o   The noun has already been mentioned.
  I like to eat popcorn at the game. *The* popcorn at the arena is delicious.

- o   The noun is preceded by a superlative (best, worst, highest, lowest) that makes its identity clear to the reader.
  Our team played *the* best team in the conference.

- o   The noun has a unique identity.
  The Billikens are scoring a lot of points tonight.

Indefinite Articles: *a, an*
Use *a* or *an* before an object that does not yet have a specific identity for the reader.
> *A* fan dropped his popcorn when he was surprised by the sound of the buzzer.
Use *a* before consonant sounds (basketball, hoop, crowd).
> The ball flew into the stands and *a* fan caught it.
Use *an* before vowel sounds (arena, opposing team).
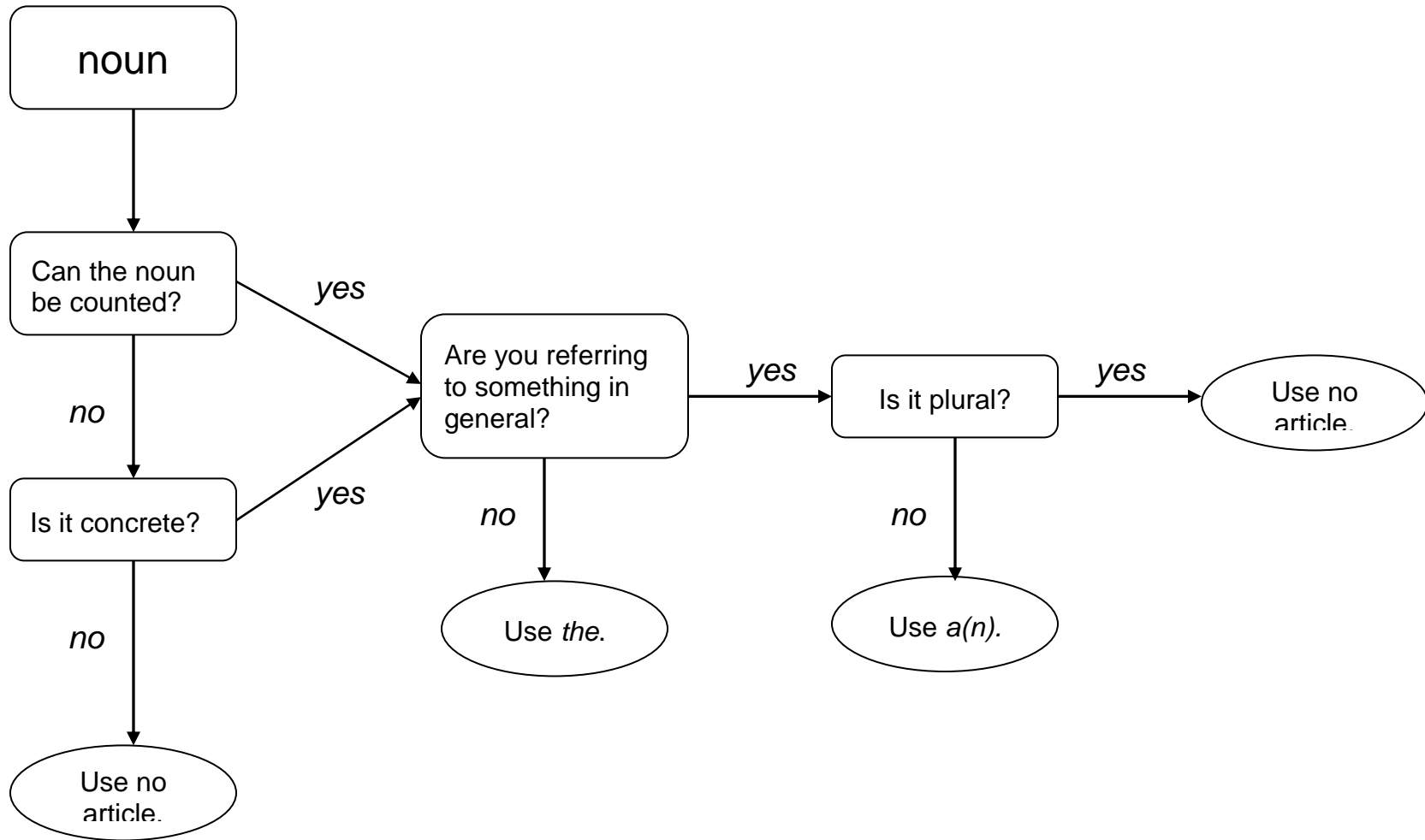> *An* eager player slammed the ball into the hoop.

Common mistake—Using *a* or *an* with a non-count noun.
> *Incorrect*. The arena was filled with *an* energy.
> *Correct*. The arena was filled with energy.

Articles Flowchart

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noun

Can the noun be counted?

yes

no

Is it concrete?

yes

no

Use no article.

Are you referring to something in general?

yes

no

Use *the.*

Is it plural?

yes

no

Use *a(n).*

Use no article.

Different Types of Nouns

Count noun examples
window, animal, enclosure, encounter, tree, boat, bridge, avalanche

Concrete noun examples
poem, water, figure, crowd, breath, night, day, sunlight, sunset

Abstract noun examples
poetry, time, theory, knowledge, space

Referring to something in general
Would you hand me a pen? I want to write a letter.

Referring to something specific:
Did you notice the moon? We are on the planet Earth.

Plural noun examples
windows, animals, enclosures, encounters, trees, boats, bridges, emotions

The rule of *of*
"Of" is a way of symbolizing that something belongs to something else. For instance, "The time of day is noon." "Time" belongs to the concrete noun "day."

Adjectives
Sometimes an adjective comes between a noun and its article. For instance, "We are on the third planet." The word "third" acts as an adjective. It is describing the noun "planet."