Module 1 Unit 1
Grammar: articles

Summary

Try not to get lost in the rules. Use a limited number of concepts to help you make sense of how to use the definite article (the) and the indefinite article (a/an), and when to use no article at all.

Definite = I think you know which 'X' I’m talking about.

Indefinite = I don’t think you know which 'X' I mean.

With the definite article the, use the following concepts:

- uniqueness – using the to refer to something there is only one of (e.g. the moon) except when using proper nouns; most proper nouns don’t take the (e.g. Russia, Bruce).

- reference – using the to refer to something that is evident elsewhere in the text or in the context (e.g. ‘Look at the blackboard’).

- particularity – using the to refer to a particular instance of something and give enough information so that the reader knows which one you mean (e.g. ‘the diagram below’).

- category/class/type (I’m not talking about a specific 'X' but I use the X to represent an entire category, class or type):
  
  o using the with a noun to mean every member of that category, class or type, e.g. ‘The nocturnal behaviour of the owl is similar to that of the cat’.

  o using the in front of an adjective used to substitute for a noun to mean every member of that category, class or type (e.g. ‘the underprivileged’).
With the indefinite article *a/an*, use the following concepts:

- use *a/an* before just one 'X' whenever it is indefinite (I don't think you know which 'X' I mean). This often happens when we refer to 'X' for the first time - first reference (e.g. 'There’s a bear in there').

- plural nouns and non-count nouns – never use the indefinite article *a/an*.

Use the following concepts to help you know when to use no article at all:

- plural nouns (e.g. *apples, words*) and non-count nouns (e.g. *food, language*) that are non-specific (i.e. I’m not talking about any particular 'X's, just 'X's in general), use no article at all (e.g. ‘Apples are in season just now’. ‘We need food to survive’).