First the good news: There are only three articles in English: a, an and the.
There are two types of articles *indefinite* 'a' and 'an' or *definite* 'the'. You also need to know when not to use an article.

The bad news is that their proper use is complex, especially when you get into the advanced use of English. Quite often you have to work it out by what sounds right, which can be frustrating for a learner.

**Indefinite articles - a and an (determiners)**

A and an are the indefinite articles. They refer to something not specifically known to the person you are communicating with.

A and an are used before nouns that introduce something or someone you have not mentioned before:-

For  "I saw **an** elephant this morning."
example: "I ate **a** banana for lunch."

A and an are also used when talking about your profession:-

For  "I am **an** English teacher."
example: "I am **a** builder."

You use **a** when the noun you are referring to begins with a consonant (b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y or z), for example, "**a** city", "**a** factory", and "**a** hotel".

You use **an** when the noun you are referring to begins with a vowel (a, e, i, o, u)

Pronunciation changes this rule. It's the sound that matters, not the spelling.

If the next word begins with a consonant sound when we say it, for example, "**university**" then we use **a**. If the next word begins with a vowel sound when we say it, for example "**hour**" then we use **an**.

You say "**university**" with a "y" sound at the beginning as though it were spelt "**you**iversity".

So, "**a** university" **IS** correct.

We say "**hour**" with a silent h as though it were spelt "**our**".

So, "**an** hour" **IS** correct.

(Lots of people get this wrong - including native speakers.)
Definite Article - the (determiners)

You use the when you know that the listener knows or can work out what particular person/thing you are talking about.

For example: "The apple you ate was rotten."

You should also use the when you have already mentioned the thing you are talking about.

For example: "She's got two children; a girl and a boy. The girl's eight and the boy's fourteen."

We use the to talk about geographical points on the globe.

For example: the North Pole, the equator

We use the to talk about rivers, oceans and seas

For example: the Nile, the Pacific, the English channel

We also use the before certain nouns when we know there is only one of a particular thing.

For example: the rain, the sun, the wind, the world, the earth, the White House etc..

However if you want to describe a particular instance of these you should use a/an.

For example: "I could hear the wind." / "There's a cold wind blowing."

The is also used to say that a particular person or thing being mentioned is the best, most famous, etc. In this use, 'the' is usually given strong pronunciation:

For example: "Harry's Bar is the place to go."
Example:

“You don't mean you met the Tony Blair, do you?”

!Note - The doesn't mean all:-

"The books are expensive." = (Not all books are expensive, just the ones I'm talking about.)

For example:

"Books are expensive." = (All books are expensive.)

No article

We usually use no article to talk about things in general:-

Inflation is rising.

People are worried about rising crime. (Note! People generally, so no article)

You do not use an article when talking about sports.

For example: My son plays football.

Tennis is expensive.

You do not use an article before uncountable nouns when talking about them generally.

For example: Information is important to any organisation.

Coffee is bad for you.

You do not use an article before the names of countries except where they indicate multiple areas or contain the words (state(s), kindom, republic, union). Kingdom, state, republic and union are nouns, so they need an article.

No article - Italy, Mexico, Bolivia, England

For example: Use the - the UK (United Kingdom), the USA (United States of America), the Irish Republic

Multiple areas! the Netherlands, the Philippines, the British Isles