

Proper Nouns that Require the Definite Article

Most proper nouns, because they refer to inherently specific entities, do not take the definite article. Certain proper nouns, however, especially those referring to collective entities, must be preceded by *the*. The first chart on this page lists three proper noun forms that require *the*. The second chart identifies six semantic categories that appear in academic discourse and provides examples; the overall selection may help you to recognize when to apply the definite article to similar nouns.

Three proper noun forms requiring *the*:

Names that are grammatically plural:

the Chicago Bears

the Johnsons

the Russians

Names that are grammatically singular but express collective entities:

the American Psychological Association

the Chinese

the Milky Way

the Supreme Court

Names cast in the form: the ____ of/on/for ____:

the United States of America

the University of Minnesota

the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Exercise—After you have looked over the information in both charts, test yourself by making all necessary corrections to the underlined proper nouns in the following sentences. Then ask a writing consultant to review your work.

1. The “handle” of Little Dipper contains Polaris, also known as North Star.
2. The Taipei is the capital of Taiwan.
3. The Brigham Young University is operated by Mormon Church.
4. Velvet Revolution brought down Communist Party in Czechoslovakia.
5. Various religious and cultural traditions have a version of Golden Rule.
6. The Secretary General presides over United Nations.

<p>Astronomical Entities</p> <p>Galaxies the Andromeda Galaxy the Milky Way</p> <p>Navigational Stars, Constellations, & Clusters the Big Dipper the Hunter (But: Orion) the North Star (But: Polaris) the Pleiades</p> <p>Geographical & Geopolitical Entities</p> <p>Bays the Bay of Bengal the Bay of Pigs But: San Francisco Bay, Biscayne Bay</p> <p>Bridges the Khaju Bridge the San Francisco Bay Bridge</p> <p>Canals the Panama Canal the Suez Canal</p> <p>Cities the Hague Note: <i>The Hague</i> is the only current example known worldwide; nearly all city names take no article.</p> <p>Countries the Gambia the United Arab Emirates the United States; the United States of America Note: Sudan, Netherlands, and Ukraine no longer require <i>the</i>.</p> <p>Deserts the Gobi Desert the Sahara Desert</p> <p>Forests the Amazon Rainforest the Black Forest</p> <p>Global Coordinates & Major Regions the arctic; the arctic circle the East; the West the equator the northern hemisphere the North Pole the prime meridian the 38th parallel (But: 38 degrees north longitude)</p> <p>Groups of Islands & Archipelagos the Azores the British Isles the Patagonian Archipelago</p> <p>Groups of Lakes the Finger Lakes the Great Lakes</p> <p>Gulfs the Gulf of Mexico the Gulf of Tonkin</p>	<p>Mountain Ranges the Himalayas the Rocky Mountains; the Rockies the Sierra Nevada Note: Individual mountains requiring <i>the</i> are rare: <i>the Matterhorn</i> is one example.</p> <p>Oceans & Seas the Mediterranean Sea the Pacific Ocean</p> <p>Peninsulas the Jaffna Peninsula the Sinai Peninsula</p> <p>Towers & Tunnels The Eiffel Tower The Holland Tunnel</p> <p>Governmental, Political, Military, Law Enforcement, and Religious Bodies, and Related Laws & Documents the Democratic Party the Supreme Court the EU; the European Union the FBI; the Federal Bureau of Investigation the IPCC; the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change the Air Force; the US Air Force the police the Roman Catholic Church the Council of Trent the Twelve Apostles the Bible the Ten Commandments the Magna Charta the Bill of Rights</p> <p>Historical Eras & Events the Bay of Pigs Invasion the Boxer Rebellion the Cold War the Cultural Revolution the First World War (But: World War I) the Middle Ages the Ming Dynasty the Paleolithic Era the Renaissance the 1800s the 21st Century</p> <p>Official Titles the Chief Justice the Pope the Prime Minister (But: Prime Minister Tony Blair) The President, Barack Obama, was sworn in. (But: President Barack Obama was sworn in.)</p> <p>Philanthropic Organizations the Carnegie Foundation the Make a Wish Foundation the National Endowment for the Arts</p>
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Remember, most proper nouns take no article. Examples: (1) single astronomical bodies, such as *Polaris*, (2) single geographical bodies, such as *North America*, (3) states, such as *Minnesota*, (4) most cities, such as *Chicago*, (5) most streets and roads, such as *Main Street* and *Jewell Road*, (6) parks, such as *Central Park*, (7) most holidays, such as *Memorial Day*, (8) most magazines, such as *Newsweek*, (9) most diseases, such as *appendicitis*, and (10) personal names, such as *William Shakespeare*.