1. Is it a proper noun?

Yes: see Explanation A

No: it is a common noun

2. Does the common noun have a specific referent?

Yes: use "the." See Explanation B

No

3. Is the common noun countable or uncountable? (see Explanation C)

Countable: see Explanation D

Uncountable: no article. See Explanation E
**Explanation A:** IF:

*THE PROPER NOUN IS SINGULAR → NO ARTICLE*
  
  e.g.: Paul, Champaign, India, Chicago, August, Saturday, Green Street, Mount Everest, Lake Victoria

*THE PROPER NOUN IS PLURAL → USE "THE"*
  
  e.g.: the United States, the United Kingdom, the Rockies, the Alps, the Brazilians, the Chinese (people)

*A PREPOSITIONAL PHRASEコンFOLLOWS THE PROPER NOUN → USE "THE"*
  
  e.g.: the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Chicago, the Baseball Hall of fame

**EXCEPTIONS:**

- seas and oceans: the Pacific Ocean, the Red Sea, the Dead Sea
- canals, deserts, forests, and peninsulas: the Erie Canal, the Black Forest, the Gobi Desert
- newspapers: the Chicago Tribune, the Washington Post, the Daily Illini
- periods and events in history: the Renaissance, the War of the Roses, the Civil War
- names of public institutions and buildings: the Plaza Hotel, the Taj Mahal, the Sears Tower, the Empire State Building, the New York Stock Exchange, the Securities & Exchange Commission or the SEC, the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board or the PCAOB.

**Explanation B:**

*THE NOUN HAS A SPECIFIC REFERENT → USE "THE." For example, use “the” with:*

a) nouns that are unique because of the reader and writer’s knowledge of the world or the topic: the sun, the moon, the earth, the president, the market price, the company, the university.

b) nouns that are unique/specific because the writer mentioned the noun previously: I bought a new jacket. I wore the jacket to my job interview.

c) nouns that have specific reference because the noun precedes:
   - a prepositional phrase: the shares at the market place, the company of my dreams, the board of directors
   - a clause: the people who buy bonds, the dealers who sell stocks
   - a reduced clause: the rate you earn, the woman he loves, the stocks I bought, the policies managers must obey

**Explanation C:**

*Countable nouns are individual items. Uncountable nouns describe things we cannot count. Uncountable nouns fall into the following categories:*

- mass items: advice, information, furniture, hair, homework, competition, equipment, data
- liquids: coffee, water, milk, tea, juice
- powders: flour, rice, salt, pepper, sugar, sand
- specific types of food: bread, cereal, fruit, meat, soup, toast
- abstract ideas: love, beauty, courage, wisdom, honesty, intelligence
- subjects of study: accounting, anthropology, biology, chemistry (Note: some subjects of study take an -s, such as mathematics, economics, physics)
- games and sports: football, soccer, baseball
- natural forces: heat, humidity, rain, snow, sunlight, thunder, weather

**Explanation D:**

*THE COMMON NOUN IS COUNTABLE AND SINGULAR → USE "A/AN" (e.g.: a dog, a building, a solution, an animal)*

*THE COMMON NOUN IS COUNTABLE AND PLURAL → NO ARTICLE (e.g.: managers, office workers, stocks, funds)*

-Use common plural countable nouns with no preceding article when you make generalizations (e.g., money market funds)

**Explanation E:**

*UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS HAVE NO PLURAL → NO ARTICLE (unless the uncountable noun has a specific referent, as explained in Step 2 above) (e.g.: advice, information, wine, sand, bread, education, basketball, wind)*

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