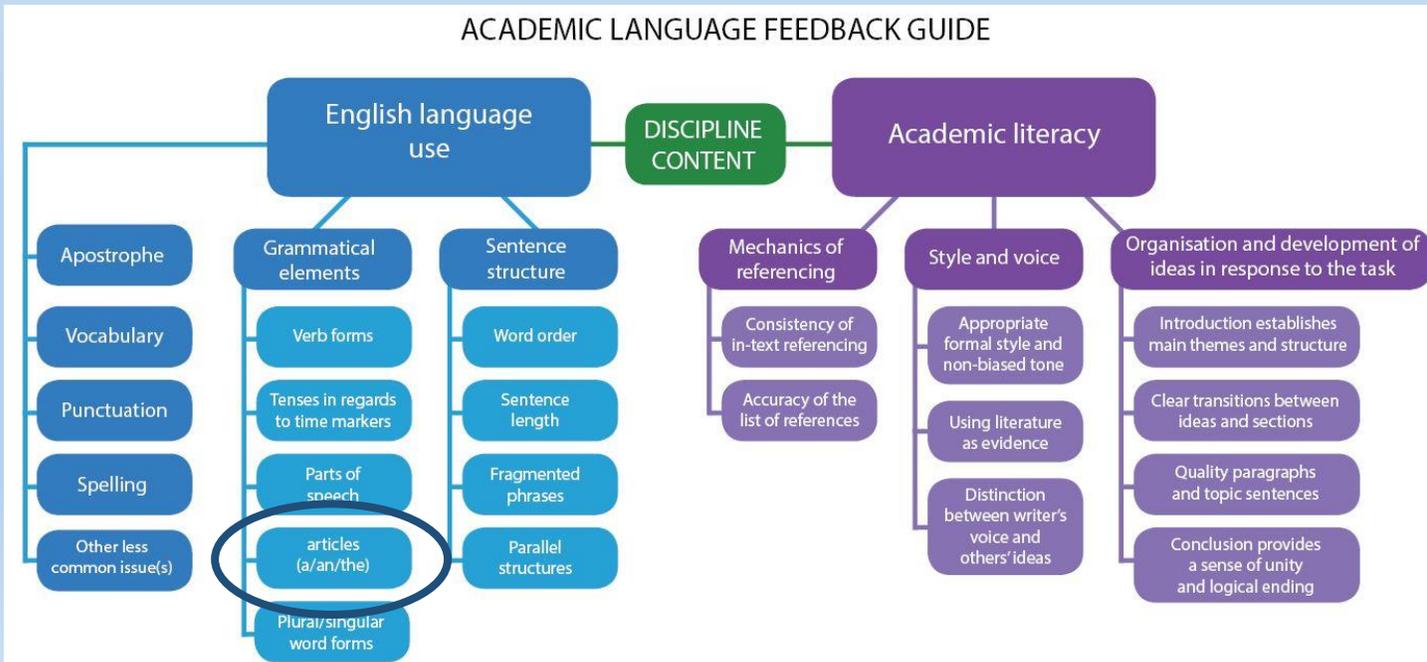


Articles – a/an/the/zero article

Dr Anna Podorova,
Ms Julia Ghazarian,
Dr Amber McLeod
Faculty of Education,
Updated 6 February 2017



Re-visit

Articles are those small words **a**, **an** and **the**, that often appear before nouns in the English language. Please remember that all nouns in the English language have articles. Sometimes, it is a 'zero' article which we cannot see, but it is there! Nouns do not always follow the articles immediately; numerals and adjectives can be used between articles and nouns.

*Here is **a** tutor at work in **a** tutorial room. **The** tutor has **an** idea about how to help students write **an** assignment. **The** 20 tired students in **the** tutorial room have been trying to write **the** assignment all morning. **The** assignment is about **the** diagnostic test results.*

Please note how the articles in the story change from being indefinite (non-specific) to definite (specific) as the reader becomes more familiar with each topic.

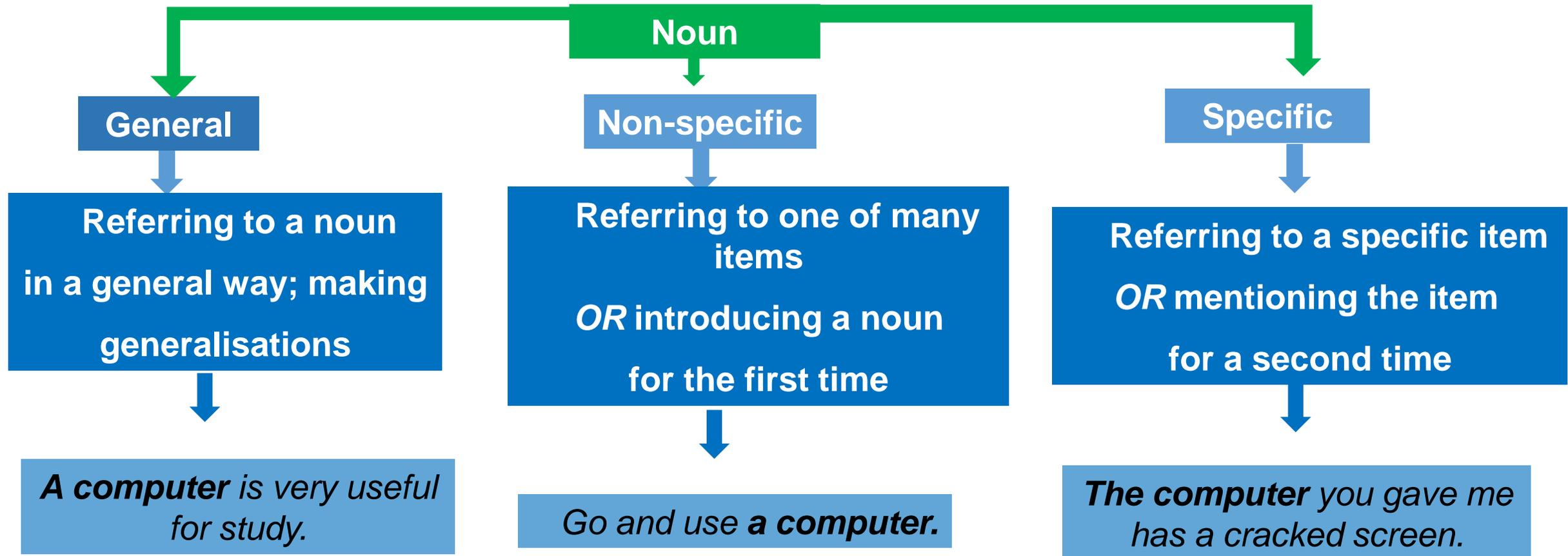
Articles are used to modify a noun.

There are **two types of articles: 'definite ' and 'indefinite'**. The definite article is used when we are being specific and the indefinite article is used when we are being non-specific.

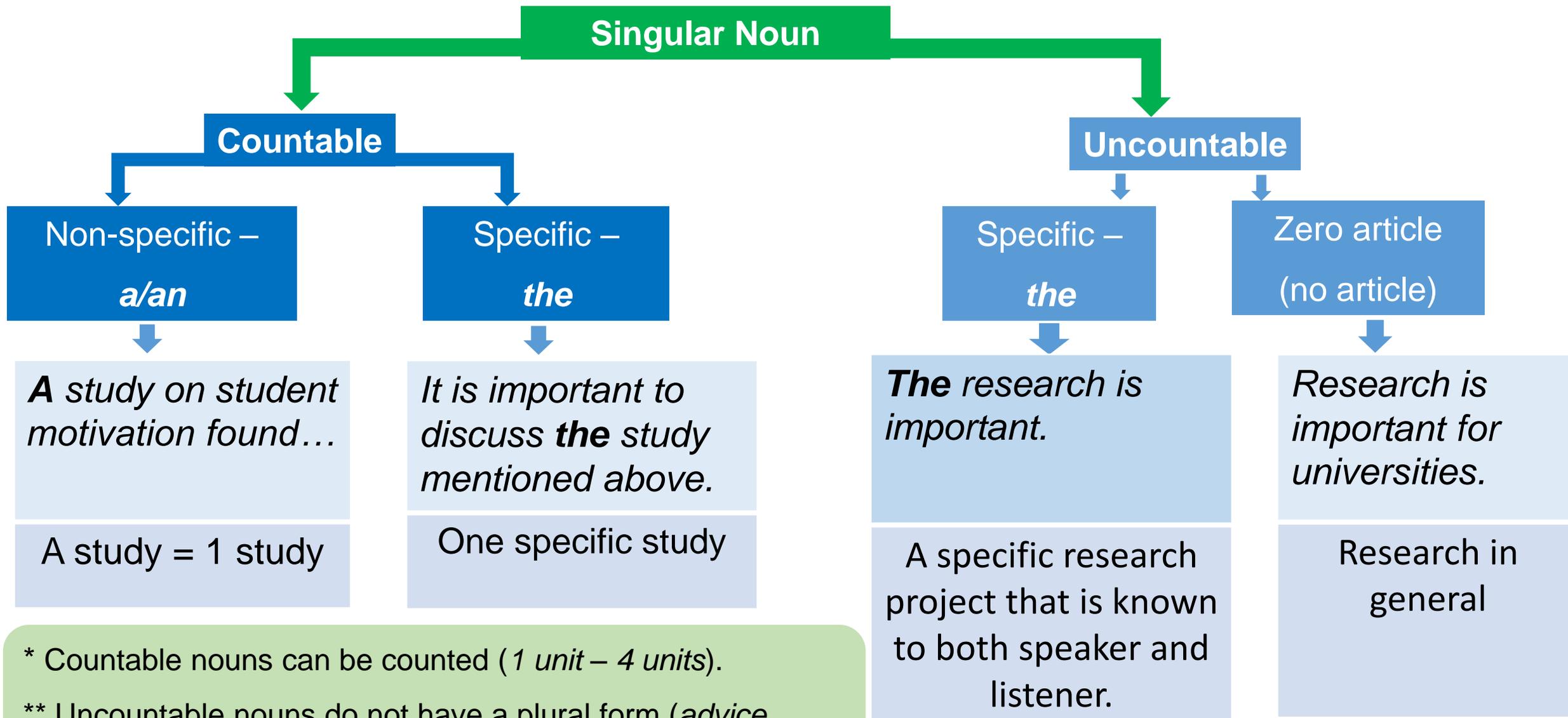
The = definite article	'a' or 'an' = indefinite article	
the (can be used with both singular and plural forms)	'a' or 'an' (= one, only used with singular nouns) - depending on the first sound of the noun. It is not always the same as the first letter.	
<i>The teacher demonstrated several cards to the students.</i>	The article 'a' is used before singular nouns (or phrases) that start with consonants: BCDFGHJKLMNPQRSTVWXYZ <i><u>a</u> student</i> <i><u>a</u> memorable experience</i>	The article 'an' is used before singular countable nouns (or phrases) that begin with vowel sounds: AEIOU <i><u>an</u> experience</i> <i><u>an</u> automatic tool</i> <i>An honours student (silent 'h')</i>

Three ways articles can be used

Articles can be used when referring to something in a general, non-specific (indefinite) or specific (definite) way.



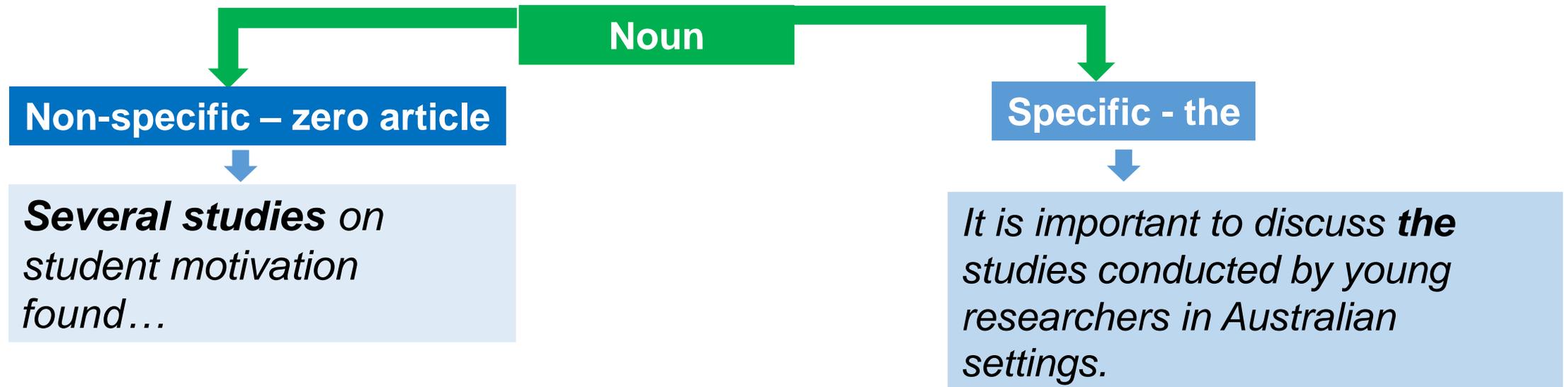
How articles are used with singular countable* and uncountable** nouns



* Countable nouns can be counted (1 unit – 4 units).

** Uncountable nouns do not have a plural form (advice, information, knowledge, money, music, news, power, etc.).

How articles are used with plural countable nouns



Quick tips

Quick tips

Remember that all nouns in the English language have articles. The article can be **a/an/the** or the **'zero' article** - you have to make an informed choice.

Pay attention to how articles are used in your readings.

When checking a noun in a dictionary, pay attention to whether the noun is countable or uncountable and which articles are used in examples.

Learn more

Useful links on articles, common errors and more:

Englishpage.com

Edufind.com – English Grammar
Guide

Englisch-hilfen.de

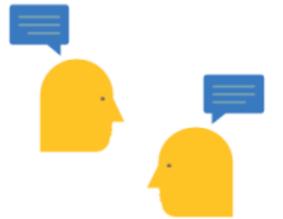
Griffith University – Help Yourself

Monash University, *Language and Learning, Engineering Grammar: articles.*

Purdue University *Online Writing Lab (OWL):*

Face-to-face support Who can help with English at Monash?

English Connect –
conversational circles,
peer feedback on your
writing and grammar
workshops



Resources – grammar books

- Azar, B. S. & Hagen, S.A. (2009). *Understanding and using English grammar (4th ed.)*. USA: Pearson Longman.
- Borjars, K. & Burridge, K. *Introducing English grammar (2nd ed.)*. London: Hodder Education.
- Foley, M. & Hall, D. (2012). *MyGrammarLab (Advanced)*. England: Pearson.
- Hewings, M. (2012). *Advanced grammar in use: a reference and practice book for advanced students of English (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Murphy, R. (2011). *English Grammar in Use (Intermediate) (3 ed.)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Copyright © Monash University (2017). All rights reserved. Except as provided in the Copyright Act 1968, this work may not be reproduced in any form without the written permission of English Connect web administrator. Material created by Dr Anna Podorova, Ms Julia Ghazarian and Dr Amber McLeod.