

A & an – indefinite article

The indefinite article in English is an important part of speech because it introduces a noun phrase and implies that the thing referred to is non-specific. Typically, it is used to introduce new concepts into a discourse.

❖ Below are some examples of when we use the indefinite article.

1. Before a singular countable noun which is mentioned for the first time and represents no particular person or thing.

- We are staying in **a** very good hotel tonight.
- We recruited **a** new CEO, who used to work for **a** competitor.
- **A** producer must not place **a** product on the market unless it is **a** safe product.

2. Before a singular countable noun which is used as an example of a class of things.

- **A** business plan is a written document that describes your business.
- **A** holding company is a company which owns a controlling interest in another company.
- **A** good hotel can make your trip special.

3. Before names of professions.

- She works three days a week as **a** secretary for the firm.
- I'm **an** accountant working for a small company.
- A formal education is not always necessary in order to become **a** professional photographer.

4. Before certain numbers (*hundred, thousand, million, etc.*), before *half* when *half* follows a whole number and before fractions.

- About **a** third of the budget is spent on aid to poor regions.
- The company plans to layoff more than **a** hundred employees effective January 1st.
- Employees are entitled to two and **a** half days of holiday a month.

5. Before expressions of price, speed, ratio, etc.

- The excess baggage is charged at 4 pounds **a** kilo over the 20kg limit.
- According to the manufacturer, diesel engine emits only 119g/km of CO2 when driving at 62 miles **an** hour.
- Working 55 hours **a** week is a requirement for a well-paying job.

❖ The choice of the indefinite article (**a** or **an**) is based on the pronunciation of the word that follows the article

We use **a** before a consonant sound and we pronounce it as /ə/.

- ScotAsh is **a** company that recycles coal ash into building products.
- The new collection embodies quality and style with **a** special attention to detail.

We use **an** before a vowel sound and we pronounce it as /ən/.

- If you have been hurt in **an** accident, you might be entitled to make a compensation claim.
- Solar panelling is a lot more cost effective than many people think, producing **an** impressive amount of electricity.

Be especially careful with words beginning with *o*, *u* or *h*, or with abbreviations.

- Why should I join **a** union? /ə/ + /j/
- The symposium is **a** one-day event which gives students an opportunity to present new research. /ə/ + /w/
- Our equipment is imported from **a** European country. /ə/ + /j/
- The meeting is in **an** hour. /ən/ + /au/
- H&M is asking consumers to bring in their used clothes to **an** H&M shop. /ən/ + /ei/
- I completed **an** MD in the University of Dundee as a Clinical Research Fellow. /ən/ + /e/

❖ Exercise: Complete with **a** or **an** if necessary.

1. There has been ___ ever-growing number of UK lottery e-mail scams.
2. I managed to get ___ room at the last minute.
3. ___ employers should sensibly enforce their smoking ban.
4. His ideas had ___ clear effect on the forward direction of the brand.
5. Our objective is to give ___ accurate picture of the company.
6. Future orders need to be dealt with in ___ more satisfactory manner.
7. Last year more than ___ fourth of the budget was financed by the sale of state property.
8. The City plans to buy ___ new equipment for Sportsplex.
9. There were at least ___ thousand people present that day.
10. Most modules take between 30 minutes and ___ hour to finish.
11. The subsidiary is the leading manufacturer of ___ coaches.
12. The team members are working towards ___ common objective.
13. ___ interest rate is the percentage which a bank charges you when you borrow money.
14. My colleague has a husband who is ___ well-paid advertising executive.
15. Do you need a referral from ___ GP to visit these clinics?

Key: 1. an, 2. a, 3. / (do not use the indefinite article before a plural noun), 4. a, 5. an, 6. a, 7. a, 8. / (do not use the indefinite article before an uncountable noun), 9. a, 10. an, 11. / (plural noun), 12. a, 13. an, 14. a, 15. a