

Articles (1): a, an or the

1 Compare a and an:

We use **a** before words which begin with consonants (b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l ...):

a doctor a big car a girl

We also use **a** before **u** when it sounds like the word 'you'; and before **eu**:

*university (sound: 'you'): a university
a European city*

We use **an** before words which begin with vowels (a, e, i, o, u):

an apple an interesting film

We also use **an** before words that begin with a silent **h**. Compare **hour** and **house**:

*hour (sound: 'our'): an hour
house: a house*

2 Compare a/an and the:

Mary: *I bought a CD player and a TV yesterday.* ~ Joe: *Was the CD player expensive?*

We usually use **a/an** with a noun to talk about a person or thing for the first time:

a CD player

We use **the** when we talk about the person or thing again:

the CD player (= the one that Mary bought)

3 There are some special uses of a/an and the:

▶ We use **a/an** with prices, frequency and speeds:

It costs £2 a litre.

I drink about three cups of coffee a day.

You're driving at ninety miles an hour!

▶ We use **a/an** before **hundred, thousand, million**:

a hundred people a thousand days

▶ We use **a/an** for talking about jobs:

I'm a bank manager.

▶ We use **the** when there is only one of something:

May I turn on the TV? (There is only one TV in the room.)

Where's Mary? ~ She's in the kitchen.

(There is only one kitchen in the house.)

▶ We use **the** with musical instruments:

I play the guitar. Jane plays the violin.

Practice

A Put a or an in the gaps.

▶ I bought a..... new car yesterday.

▶ It's an..... old film.

1 She's reading interesting book.

2 They've got house in Spain.

3 It's cheap restaurant.

4 He's Italian businessman.

5 The journey took hour.

6 We've lost black cat.

7 I want to buy umbrella.

8 It was difficult exam.

B Now finish the sentences using a or an and the correct phrase from the box.

European country
Japanese city

Indian river
English airport

American director
German car

university town

▶ Steven Spielberg is an American director.

1 Tokyo is

2 Heathrow is

3 The Ganges is

- 4 Oxford is
- 5 A Mercedes is
- 6 Spain is

C Ian Brent wants to take out an insurance policy. An agent from the insurance company, Mr Cox, is asking him questions. Put *a*, *an* or *the* in the gaps in these conversations.

Mr Cox: Hello, my name is Mike Cox. I am from (1) *an*..... insurance company.
I have (2) *a*..... form with some questions. Your name is Ian Brent.
Do you have (3)..... middle name?

Mr Brent: Yes, my full name is Ian Stanley Brent.

Mr Cox: All right. Now, where do you live, Mr Brent?

Mr Brent: I live in (4)..... house in Peckham.

Mr Cox: Peckham, I see. And what is your job?

Mr Brent: I'm (5)..... scientist. I work for (6)..... government.

Mr Cox: Do you work in (7)..... laboratory or in (8)..... office?

Mr Brent: I work in (9)..... small office in (10)..... centre of London.

Mr Cox: And how do you get to (11)..... office from Peckham?

Mr Brent: I usually take (12)..... underground.

Mr Cox: What is your salary, Mr Brent?

Mr Brent: Well, I earn almost £35,000 (13)..... year.

Mr Cox: Now, your family. You're married, aren't you?

Mr Brent: Yes, and we have two children, (14)..... girl and (15)..... boy.
(16)..... girl is sixteen and (17)..... boy is fourteen.

Mr Cox: Fine. And you want to take out (18)..... insurance policy for £100,000.
Is that right?

Mr Brent: Yes, that's right.

Mr Cox: Well, that's all. Can you sign (19)..... form here at (20).....
bottom? Thank you.

D There are some mistakes in these sentences. Put a tick (✓) if you think the underlined word is correct. Cross it out and change it if you think it's wrong.

▶ I'm not sure what she does, but I think she's a✓..... doctor.

▶ I saw the a..... thousand different things when I was on holiday.

1 Be careful! That perfume costs £100 a..... bottle.

2 We must invite him to the party. He plays a..... piano and a..... guitar.

3 A: What does John do?

B: I'm not sure, but I think he is the..... teacher in a school.

4 She likes to drive at the..... hundred miles an hour.

5 I play the..... violin in an orchestra. They pay me £80 the..... day!

6 I've got the..... hundred jobs to do before we leave.

7 A: Is my handbag in the living-room?

B: No, it isn't. I saw it in a..... kitchen.