

UNIT
64

The indefinite article: a / an

- A** The indefinite article has two forms, **a / an**, that are the same for all nouns.
a man a woman a dog a rucksack

A is used before words that start with:

- a consonant or a semivowel (**w, y**): *a book, a girl, a car, a table, a window, a young man*
- aspirated **h**: *a house, a horse, a hand, a hot day*
- the sound /j/: *a uniform, a university, a unit, a euro, a European country*

An is used before words that start with:

- a vowel: *an apple, an egg, an onion, an umbrella, an Italian student*
- mute **h**: *an hour, an heir, an honest person*

NB: The only words that begin with a mute **h** are: **hour, heir, heiress, honour, honest** and their derivations (**hourly, honourable, honestly...**).

- B** The article **a / an** is used before singular countable nouns (see p.196) to indicate:

- a thing or person amongst others (any one, not one in particular).

Take a chair, please.

She gave me a red rose.

- a person or thing that is mentioned for the first time in a story.

A good king ruled over the country at that time.

I've never seen a man with such a long beard.

- an example that represents an entire species or category.

A lion is a wild animal.

An oak is a big tree.

- an object that we have or don't have.

I've got an umbrella.

I haven't got a watch.



- C** The article **a / an** is also used before nouns that indicate:

- professions and occupations.

He's an engineer and his wife is an interpreter.

- certain ailments or illnesses.

I've got a cough. She's got a high temperature.

- D** The article **a / an** is also used:

- in expressions of

– price: *three pounds a kilo*

– speed: *50 miles an hour*

– frequency: *three times a day, twice a month*

- in numeric expressions.

a couple, a dozen, half a dozen, a hundred, a thousand, a million

- in exclamations, before a singular noun.

What a life! What a horrible day!

- before **Mr / Ms** + surname, to indicate 'a certain someone'.

A Mr Cox lives here, but I've never seen him.



EXERCISES

The indefinite article: a / an

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64.1 Write *a* or *an* before the words or expressions.

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 <u>a</u> man | 7 <u>a</u> walnut tree |
| 2 <u>a</u> hippo | 8 <u>a</u> oak |
| 3 <u>a</u> dog | 9 <u>a</u> hundred |
| 4 <u>a</u> leaf | 10 <u>a</u> orange |
| 5 <u>a</u> hourly bus | 11 <u>a</u> iceberg |
| 6 <u>a</u> universal truth | 12 <u>a</u> worker ant |

64.2 Rearrange the words and write sentences.

1 bag - got - pear - in - a - an - and - apple - I've - my
I've got an apple and a pear in my bag.

2 have - in - uncle - Canada - cousin - and - I - an - a

3 tiger - cat - is - big - A - a - of - sort

4 wears - soldier - A - always - uniform - a

5 present - aunt - from - of - useful - got - a - an - I - mine

6 African - ostrich - bird - is - large - a - An

64.3 Choose the correct alternative.

- 1 A / An education that you enjoy is a / an important start in life.
- 2 A / An apple a day keeps a / an person healthy.
- 3 A / An honest person is a / an useful friend to have.
- 4 A / An hyena is a / an horrible kind of animal.
- 5 A / An white tiger is a / an unusual one.
- 6 A / An interesting book is a / an object worth finding.

64.4 Tick (✓) the correct expressions and correct the false ones.

1 ☒ an interesting person

2 ☐ an uniform
a uniform

3 ☐ an elephant

4 ☐ an hour and a half

5 ☐ an unique model

6 ☐ a unhappy boy

7 ☐ an Irish musician

8 ☐ a intelligent woman