

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 /ju/: *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 <input type="text"/> a man	7 <input type="text"/> walnut tree
2 <input type="text"/> hippo	8 <input type="text"/> oak
3 <input type="text"/> dog	9 <input type="text"/> hundred
4 <input type="text"/> leaf	10 <input type="text"/> orange
5 <input type="text"/> hourly bus	11 <input type="text"/> iceberg
6 <input type="text"/> universal truth	12 <input type="text"/> 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