

# 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.