

### Using Articles #1 (a / an)

A problem that a lot of learners have is using articles correctly. Therefore, with this set of Tip Sheets, we are going to look at the rules for using articles (a / an / the / zero article). We'll start with the rules for using a / an.

**a**

**or**

**an**

To begin with, remember that "a" and "an" both mean "one". So you cannot use them when you are talking about more than one thing (a plural):

a girls X

an eggs X

a people X

Next, you need to remember the difference between **vowels** and **consonants**:

The vowels in English are: **a, e, i, o, u**. The consonants are **all the other letters** (b, c, d, f, g, h, etc.).

So the rule is that we use:

**"an" + words that start with a vowel** (e.g. an apple, an egg, an ice-cream, an orange, an umbrella).



**"a" + words that start with a consonant** (e.g. a ball, a cat, a door, a fish, a girl, etc.)



**TOP TIP 1:** When a word starts with "u" **BUT** it sounds like a "y" (which is a consonant) then we must use **a** (NOT an)!

**Examples:** a university, a unicorn, a universe.



**TOP TIP 2:** We also say **"an hour"** and NOT **"a hour"** ("The journey to Lincoln takes an hour").

That's because we do not say the "h" at the beginning of the word "hour" – instead it sounds like it starts with an "o". And because it sounds like it starts with an "o", which is a consonant, we use the article **"a"**.

From what we just looked at, you'll know that we say:

**an** apple

**a** mug

However, if we use an adjective with the noun, then this might change. Look at these examples:



a red apple



a brown egg

an orange mug

an open door



That's because **the first letter of the adjective** tells us if we should use **a or an**.

Look at these and you'll see how the **first letter** can change the **a or an**:

an umbrella > a blue umbrella > an orange umbrella  
a box > a white box > an empy box

### Practice

Now see if you can remember. Choose either **a or an** for each of these sentences:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ yellow car
2. \_\_\_\_\_ orange car
3. \_\_\_\_\_ apple
4. \_\_\_\_\_ green apple
5. \_\_\_\_\_ university
6. \_\_\_\_\_ big university
7. \_\_\_\_\_ yellow cup and \_\_\_\_\_ orange cup
8. I have two shirts that I love to wear - \_\_\_\_\_ new, orange one and \_\_\_\_\_ old, white one.

ANSWERS  
1. a 2. an 3. an 4. a 5. a 6. a 7. a/an 8. a/an

In the next Tip Sheet (Using Articles #2) we look at how to use "**the**" correctly.

Regards,

Ian