

INDEFINITE ARTICLE

Beginners complain that they can hardly hear it in speech, and sometimes they struggle to pronounce the schwa sound - /ə/, which often sounds, wrongly, like /a/ in their pronunciation. Many advanced learners of English claim to be thoroughly familiar with its use, yet in their speech and writing, and sometimes even when reading a text, they seem to sort of "forget" to use it. On the other hand, examples of its deliberate omission by native speakers can be found in newspaper headlines, notices, emails, text messages, etc. Careful: it does not mean we can omit it in our everyday use of English!

The indefinite article is an important part of speech because it introduces a noun phrase and implies that the thing referred to is non-specific. Typically, it is used to introduce new concepts into a discourse.

Form: **a** & **an**

Before we look at some examples of use of the indefinite article, let us first have a look at its form.

We use **a** before a consonant sound and we pronounce it as /ə/.

- Bazz Ltd acquired **a** company last year.
- They gave us **a** special discount of 10%.
- Future orders need to be dealt with in **a** more satisfactory manner.

We use **an** before a vowel sound and we pronounce it as /ən/.

- Employees can claim compensation after **an** accident at workplace.
- Carron Tower is **an** impressive multi-storey office building.
- There has been **an** ever-growing number of UK lottery e-mail scams.

Note that it is the pronunciation of the next word which matters, not the spelling. Be especially careful with words beginning with *o*, *u* or *h*, or with abbreviations.

- Why should I join **a** union? /ə/ + /j/
- The symposium is **a** one-day event which gives students an opportunity to present new research. /ə/ + /w/
- Our equipment is imported from **a** European country. /ə/ + /j/
- The meeting is in **an** hour. /ən/ + /au/
- H&M is asking consumers to bring in their used clothes to **an** H&M shop. /ən/ + /ei/
- I completed an MD in the University of Dundee as a Clinical Research Fellow. /ən/ + /e/

Use

1. Before a singular countable noun which is mentioned for the first time and represents no particular person or thing.

- **A** producer must not place **a** product on the market unless it is **a** safe product.
- The team members are working towards **a** common objective.

- We recruited **a** new CEO, who used to work for **a** competitor.
2. Before a singular countable noun which is used as an example of a class of things.
- **A** holding company is a company which owns a controlling interest in another company.
 - **An** interest rate is the percentage which a bank charges you when you borrow money.
 - **A** good hotel can make your trip special.
3. Before names of professions.
- I'm **an** accountant working for a small company.
 - A formal education is not always necessary in order to become **a** professional photographer.
 - My colleague has a husband who is **a** well-paid advertising executive.
4. Before certain numbers (*hundred, thousand, million, etc.*), before *half* when *half* follows a whole number and before fractions.
- Derrado College plans to layoff more than **a** hundred employees effective July 1st.
 - Employees are entitled to two and **a** half days of holiday a month.
 - About **a** third of the budget is spent on aid to poor regions.
5. Before expressions of price, speed, ratio, etc.
- The excess baggage is charged at 4 pounds **a** kilo over the 20 kg limit.
 - According to the manufacturer, diesel engine emits only 119 g/km of CO2 when driving at 62 miles **an** hour.
 - Working 55 hours **a** week is a requirement for a well-paying job.

In next week's lesson find out more about the use of the indefinite article. In the meantime do the following exercise on the use of **a** & **an**.

A. Complete with **a** or **an** if necessary.

1. I managed to get ___ room at the last minute.
2. ___ employers should sensibly enforce their smoking ban.
3. His ideas had ___ clear effect on the forward direction of the brand.
4. Our objective is to give ___ accurate picture of the company.
5. Last year more than ___ fourth of the budget was financed by the sale of state property.
6. The City plans to buy ___ new equipment for Sportsplex.
7. There were at least ___ thousand people present that day.
8. Most modules take between 30 minutes and ___ hour to finish.
9. The subsidiary is the leading manufacturer of ___ coaches.
10. ___ business plan is a written document that describes your business.

Key: 1. a, 2. / (do not use the indefinite article before a plural noun), 3. a, 4. an, 5. a, 6. / (do not use the indefinite article before an uncountable noun), 7. a, 8. an, 9. / (plural noun), 10. a

Lekcija 47. NEODREĐENI ČLAN

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