

A Coffee and an Apple

Lesson 4 · Articles: **a** / **an** · A1 · 30 minutes

A1**GRAMMAR****BEGINNER****30 MIN**

★ In this lesson you will learn to:

- Use **a** before a consonant sound, **an** before a vowel sound
- Apply the **SOUND rule** — listen, don't just look at the letter
- Handle tricky cases: **a university, an hour, an MBA, a European**
- Skip articles with **plurals, uncountables and proper nouns**

1 Warm-Up: Two Tiny Words

English has two small words that come before many nouns: **a** and **an**. They are called *indefinite articles*. They mean the same thing — 'one of something'. The question is: when do we use which one?

a

before a consonant sound

an

before a vowel sound

a book **a** pizza **a** student
a coffee **a** nice day

an apple **an** orange **an** egg
an engineer **an** old friend

★ **Today's key idea:** The rule is not about LETTERS. It is about SOUNDS. So **a university** but **an hour** — even though "university" starts with the vowel letter *u* and "hour" starts with the consonant letter *h*. We will explain everything — let's go to the school café first!

2 Lunchtime at the School Café

It's 1 o'clock. Anna, Marco and Yuki are hungry. They go to the school café. Mr Brown joins them. Look for all the **a** and **an** words as they order.

The small café on the ground floor of the school. A young waiter smiles.

Waiter

Good afternoon! What would you like to order?

Anna

I would like **a sandwich**, please. **A cheese sandwich**.

Waiter

And to drink?

Anna

An orange juice, please.

Marco

For me, **a pizza**, please. And **a coffee**.

Waiter

A small coffee or **a big one**?

Marco

A big one, thank you!

Yuki

I would like **a salad** and **an apple**. And **a glass** of water, please.

Mr Brown

(arriving) Hello, class! Can I have **a cup** of tea, please? With **an ice cube** — it's hot today.

Waiter

A cup of tea and **an ice cube**. Anything else?

Mr Brown

Yes, **an egg salad**, please. And **a banana**.

Waiter

So... **a cheese sandwich**, **a pizza**, **a salad**, **an egg salad**, **an orange juice**, **a coffee**, **a glass** of water, **a cup** of tea with **an ice cube**, **an apple**, and **a banana**. Is that right?

Anna

Perfect! We are very hungry students today!

a + noun = before a consonant sound **an + noun** = before a vowel sound

3 Café Vocabulary — 20 Words

Twenty useful café words — each with its correct article and an example.

WORD	a / an	MEANING	EXAMPLE
sandwich	a	bread with filling inside	<i>A cheese sandwich, please.</i>
pizza	a	a flat round Italian food	<i>I want a pizza.</i>
salad	a	mixed cold vegetables	<i>A green salad is healthy.</i>
apple	an	a round red or green fruit	<i>I eat an apple every day.</i>
banana	a	a long yellow fruit	<i>Marco has a banana.</i>
orange	an	a round orange fruit	<i>Anna drinks an orange juice.</i>
egg	an	what a chicken lays	<i>An egg salad is tasty.</i>
coffee	a	a hot dark drink	<i>I love a strong coffee.</i>
tea	a	a hot drink with leaves	<i>A cup of tea, please.</i>
juice	a	a drink from fruit	<i>A juice or a water?</i>
menu	a	a list of food	<i>Can I see a menu?</i>
table	a	where you put plates	<i>A table for four, please.</i>
chair	a	where you sit	<i>A chair is here.</i>
cup	a	for hot drinks	<i>A cup of tea.</i>
glass	a	for cold drinks	<i>A glass of water.</i>
plate	a	a round dish for food	<i>A clean plate.</i>
fork	a	for eating, with points	<i>A fork and a knife.</i>
spoon	a	for eating soup	<i>A spoon for my tea.</i>
knife	a	for cutting food	<i>A sharp knife.</i>
bill	a	the paper to pay	<i>Can I have the bill, please?</i>

4 Grammar Focus: A, AN — and Nothing!

Three boxes. **Box B is the magic one** — pay real attention to it.

▶ A. The Basic Rule

Use **a** or **an** before **singular countable nouns** when we talk about something for the first time, or when we mean 'one of many'.

ARTICLE	WHEN?	EXAMPLES
a	before a consonant sound	<i>a book, a pizza, a student, a coffee, a nice day</i>
an	before a vowel sound	<i>an apple, an orange, an egg, an engineer, an old friend</i>

! Remember: The 5 vowel **sounds** come from the letters **a, e, i, o, u**. All other letters usually give consonant sounds.

★ B. The Magic Rule: SOUND, Not Letter!

The **first SOUND** of the word decides — not the first letter. Some words look like they start with a vowel but sound like a consonant — and the other way around. **Always listen to the sound!**

WORD	✓ RIGHT	✗ WRONG	WHY?
university	a university	an university	sounds like YOO -niversity → Y is a consonant sound
European	a European	an European	sounds like YER -opean → Y sound
hour	an hour	a hour	the H is silent → starts with OW sound (vowel)
honest	an honest person	a honest person	the H is silent → starts with O sound
MBA / MP	an MBA	a MBA	M is pronounced "EM" → starts with E sound

✓ **Easy test:** Say the word out loud slowly. What's the **VERY** first **SOUND**? If it's an **A-E-I-O-U** sound → **an**. Anything else → **a**.

X C. When NOT to Use a / an

Three important cases where we use **nothing at all** (or "some"):

DON'T USE WITH...	WHY?	EXAMPLE
plural nouns	a/an = "one", so not with 2+	I have books ✓ / I have a books ✗
uncountable nouns	you can't count them: water, music, advice	I drink water ✓ / I drink a water ✗
proper nouns (names)	London, Marco, Italy — already unique	I live in London ✓ / I live in a London ✗

★ **Good news:** With **jobs**, ALWAYS use a/an: *I am a teacher. She is an engineer. He is a doctor. Marco is a student.*

5 Exercise A — A or AN? (10 items)

Circle the correct article. Remember Box B — it's about the SOUND.

#	SENTENCE	A	AN
1	___ apple	<input type="radio"/> a	<input type="radio"/> an
2	___ book	<input type="radio"/> a	<input type="radio"/> an
3	___ egg	<input type="radio"/> a	<input type="radio"/> an
4	___ pizza	<input type="radio"/> a	<input type="radio"/> an
5	___ orange juice	<input type="radio"/> a	<input type="radio"/> an
6	___ hour	<input type="radio"/> a	<input type="radio"/> an
7	___ university	<input type="radio"/> a	<input type="radio"/> an
8	___ old friend	<input type="radio"/> a	<input type="radio"/> an
9	___ nice day	<input type="radio"/> a	<input type="radio"/> an
10	___ honest teacher	<input type="radio"/> a	<input type="radio"/> an

Answers: **1.** an · **2.** a · **3.** an · **4.** a · **5.** an · **6.** an · **7.** a · **8.** an · **9.** a · **10.** an

6

Exercise B — Quick Check Quiz (6 items)

Read each question carefully and tick **one** answer.

1. What does Marco order to drink?

- A A tea
- B A coffee
- C An orange juice
- D A water

2. Mr Brown wants a cup of tea with...

- A milk
- B sugar
- C an ice cube
- D a lemon

3. Which is CORRECT?

- A a apple
- B a hour
- C an university
- D an orange

4. We use "an" before words that START with...

- A the letters a, e, i, o, u
- B a vowel sound
- C a consonant sound
- D any word beginning with a vowel letter

5. Which sentence is CORRECT?

- A I have a books.
- B I have books.
- C I have an books.
- D I have the books.

6. "I would like ___ hour of free time."

- A** a
- B** an
- C** the
- D** —

Answer Key: **1. B · 2. C · 3. D · 4. B · 5. B · 6. B**

7

Exercise C — Fill in the Blanks (8 items)

Fill each gap with **a**, **an**, or **—** (dash = nothing). Careful: some sentences need no article at all.

#	SENTENCE	YOUR ANSWER
1	I would like ___ pizza, please.	_____
2	Anna is eating ___ apple.	_____
3	I love ___ music.	_____
4	Marco is ___ engineer.	_____
5	We live in ___ London.	_____
6	Can I have ___ cup of tea?	_____
7	I have ___ books on my desk.	_____
8	She is ___ honest woman.	_____

Answer Key: 1. a · 2. an · 3. — · 4. an · 5. — · 6. a · 7. — · 8. an

8 Speaking & Writing — Your Turn

► Speaking Task: Order from the Menu

With a partner, take turns being the **waiter** and the **customer**. Use the Fleydo Café menu below. Each customer must order **at least 4 different items**, mixing **a** and **an** correctly.

FOOD	DRINKS	SWEET
a cheese sandwich — £4.50	a coffee — £2.00	a cookie — £1.50
a tuna sandwich — £4.50	a tea — £1.80	an ice cream — £2.50
a pizza — £6.00	an orange juice — £2.50	a piece of cake — £3.00
an egg salad — £5.50	an apple juice — £2.50	an apple pie — £3.00
a green salad — £5.00	a glass of water — free	
an omelette — £5.00	a hot chocolate — £2.80	

Example:

Waiter: Good afternoon! What would you like?

You: I'd like **a cheese sandwich** and **an orange juice**, please.

Waiter: Anything else?

You: Yes — **an apple pie** and **a coffee**, please. How much is that?

► Writing Task: What's in Your Bag?

Look inside your bag right now. Write **8 sentences** describing what is (and what is NOT) inside. Mix **a**, **an**, and **no article** (for plurals and uncountables). Check your work with the rules in Box C.

Example sentences:

- In my bag there is **a notebook**, **a pen** and **an umbrella**.
- I also have **keys** and **money**. (*plural / uncountable → no article*)
- There is **an old photo** of my family.
- There isn't **a laptop** today.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

7.

8.

★ Lesson Complete!

- ✓ I can use **a** before consonant sounds
- ✓ I can use **an** before vowel sounds
- ✓ I know the **SOUND rule** — university, hour, MBA
- ✓ I know NOT to use a/an with plurals, uncountables, and names
- ✓ I can order food and drinks at a café