

When to use A and An

Using **an** and **a** does not depend on the spelling of the word it comes before, it depends on the pronunciation of the word. In most cases though, **an** is used before words that begin with **vowels** (a, e, i, o u.):

***an** apple*

***an** elephant*

***an** igloo*

***an** oven*

***an** umbrella*

If a word starts with a **consonant** sound, use **a**.

***a** ball*

***a** car*

***a** doll*

Vowel Sounds

It is very important to know that when a word starts with a vowel sound, you should use **an**. Sometimes **u** is pronounced as **y**. Try saying these two words, see if notice how the **u** is pronounced in two different ways.

an unforgettable experience - unforgettable has a vowel sound so we use **an**.

a university - university has a **y** sound so we use **a**.

This is also the case with **o**, which may sometimes have a **w** sound. Compare:

an octopus - octopus starts with a vowel sound.

a one track mind - one-track starts has a **w** sound.

The Silent h

Sometimes with words that begin with **h**, the **h** sound is not pronounced. Unfortunately there is no rule about when the **h** is silent. Let's look at an example.

an honour - the **h** is silent. We use **an** because the honour has a vowel sound because the **h** is not pronounced: *(h)onour*.

a historic day - the **h** is pronounced. Historic starts with an **h** sound.

Activity

Now decide if an or a is needed in these sentences. Remember to focus on how the key words are pronounced:

1 - There's ___ mouse in the garden.

- an
- a

2 - We saw ___ ostrich in the zoo.

- an
- a

3 - Meet me in ___ hour.

- an
- a

4 - The clown was riding ___ one-wheel bike.

- an
- a

5 - Is that a picture of ___ unicorn?

- an
- a

6 - She said I had ___ ugly dog.

- an
- a

7 - Her parents bought her ___ horse for her birthday.

- an
- a

8 - It was ___ honest mistake.

- an
- a

9 - We all had ___ unbelievable day.

- an
- a

10 - It was ___ honour meeting you.

- an
- a

11 - She lived on ___ island for many years.

- an
- a