

## A / an and one

Reminder → 16–7

A

We use **a** before nouns and noun phrases that begin with a consonant sound. If the noun or noun phrase starts with a vowel *letter* but begins with a consonant *sound*, we also use **a**:

**a** university (/ə ju:n .../)    **a** European (/ə jʊər .../)    **a** one-parent family (/ə wʌn .../)

We use **an** before words that begin with a vowel sound, including a silent letter 'h':

**an** orange    **an** Italian    **an** umbrella    **an** hour    **an** honour

and abbreviations said as individual letters that begin with A, E, F, H, I, L, M, N, O, R, S or X:

**an** MP (/ən em pi:z/)    **an** FBI agent (/ən ef bi: ai .../)    **an** IOU (/ən ai əʊ ju: /)

But compare abbreviations said as words:

**a** NATO general (/ə nertəʊ ... /)    **a** FIFA official (/ə fi:fə ... /)    but **an** OPEC meeting (/ən əʊpek ... /)

Note that we say:

**a** history (book)    but **an** (or **a**) historical (novel)

B

We use **a / an** (not **one**) to talk about a particular but unspecified person, thing or event:

- I really need **a** cup of coffee.
- You never see **a** police officer in this part of town, do you?

We also use **a / an**, not **one**, in number and quantity expressions such as:

- three times **a** year    half **an** hour    a quarter of **an** hour    a day or so (= 'about a day')
- 50 cents **a** (= each) litre (note we can also say '50 cents for one litre')
- a** week or two (= between one and two weeks; note we can also say 'one or two weeks')
- a** few    **a** little    **a** huge number of ...

We use **a** rather than **one** in the pattern **a ... of ...** with possessives, as in:

- She's **a** colleague **of** mine.
- That's **a** friend **of** Gabriel's.

C

Before a singular countable noun **one** and **a / an** both refer to one thing:

- We'll be in Australia for **one** year. (or ... **a** year.)
- Wait here for **one** minute, and I'll be with you. (or ... **a** minute ...)

Using **one** gives a little more emphasis to the length of time, quantity, amount, etc.:

- He weighs **one** hundred and twenty kilos! Would you believe it! (using **one** emphasises the weight more than using **a**)

However, we use **one** rather than **a / an** if we want to emphasise that we are talking about *only* one thing or person rather than two or more:

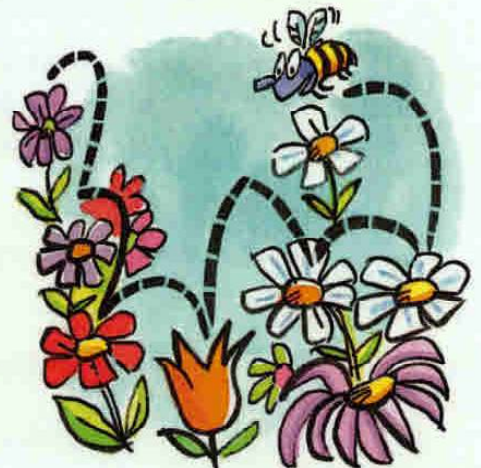
- Do you want **one** sandwich or two?
- Are you staying **only one** night?
- I just took **one** look at her and she started crying.

We use **one**, not **a / an**, in the pattern **one ... other / another**:

- Close **one** eye, and then the **other**.
- Bees carry pollen from **one** plant to **another**.

We also use **one** in phrases such as **one day**, **one evening**, **one spring**, etc. to mean a particular, but unspecified, day, evening, spring, etc.:

- Hope to see you again **one day**.
- One evening**, while he was working late at the office ...



## Exercises

## 44.1 Write a or an in the spaces. A

- |                           |                            |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 ..... unpaid bill       | 8 ..... U-turn             |
| 2 ..... DIY shop          | 9 ..... heirloom           |
| 3 ..... MP3 player        | 10 ..... NASA space launch |
| 4 ..... Euro              | 11 ..... UN decision       |
| 5 ..... MiG fighter plane | 12 ..... SOS message       |
| 6 ..... Olympic medal     | 13 ..... F grade           |
| 7 ..... AGM               | 14 ..... hero              |

## 44.2 If necessary, correct a / an or one in these sentences, or write ✓. In which sentences are a / an and one both possible? B &amp; C

- I usually go to the gym four times one week.
- There's more than one way to solve the problem.
- I phoned the council to complain, but just got passed on from a person to another.
- The rate of pay is really good here. You can earn over £20 one hour.
- Maybe we could go skiing one winter.
- The apples are 90 cents one kilo.
- Are you hungry? Would you like one piece of cake?
- The rules say that there is only one vote per member.
- You can get seven hours of recording on one disc.
- A: What would Moritz like for his birthday?  
B: Why don't you ask Leah? She's one good friend of his and will have some ideas.
- There's one pen on the floor. Is it yours?
- The library books are due back in one month.
- Do you want some of my chips? There are too many here for a person.
- I'm going to London for one day or two.
- Either I'll work late tonight or I'll come in early tomorrow, but the report's got to be finished by lunchtime a way or another.
- It will take more than one morning to finish the decorating.

## 44.3 Which is more appropriate, a / an or one? If both a / an and one are possible, write them both.

B &amp; C

- If you wait ..... second I'll get my coat and come too.
- I want to see the river ..... last time before I leave.
- The President is visiting the city ..... day in November.
- It was announced that the plane would be approximately ..... hour late.
- I could hear the sound of ..... helicopter in the distance.
- I'd just like to say ..... thing before I go.
- Misaki's baby is ..... year old already.
- Dinner should be ready in ..... hour or so.
- Hugo came over ..... evening last week.
- I've painted ..... wall already and I'll do the other tomorrow.
- I'd like to make ..... point here, Carlos, if I may.
- ..... large number of people had gathered in the square.

