A, an and the for Grade 4

Visual learning guide - English · Grade 4

Use sound and meaning to choose an article. Follow five worked cases and try 16 questions with reasons.

Start with the key idea

Use a or an before a singular countable noun when introducing one non-specific member of a group. Choose a before a consonant sound and an before a vowel sound. Use the when the listener can identify which person or thing you mean. Some sentences, including general plural statements, need no article.

1. Start with one countable thing

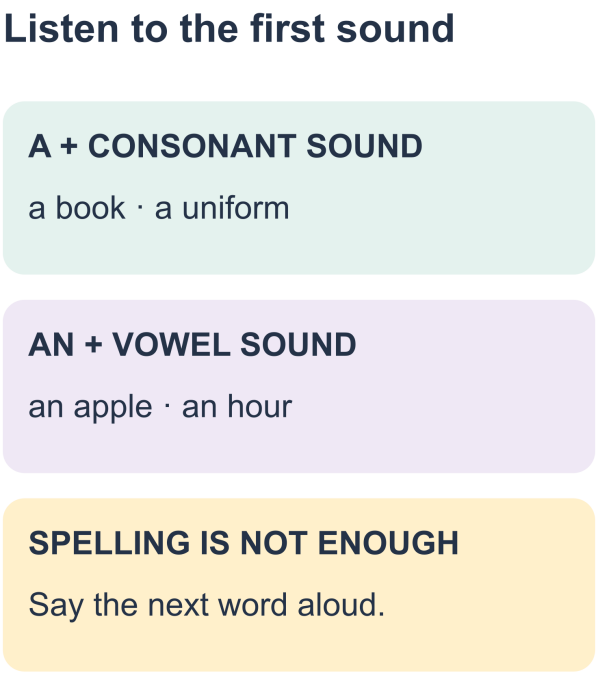
A book means one book, without identifying a particular book for the listener. An apple works the same way. Book and apple are singular countable nouns: you can say one book, two books, one apple, two apples.

A singular countable noun normally needs a determiner in an ordinary complete sentence. Say "I bought a pen", "I bought the pen" or "I bought my pen". "I bought pen" is not the usual complete form. A and an are not added before another determiner: write my pen, not a my pen.

A and an do not mean different quantities. Both introduce one. The change between them makes pronunciation smoother; it does not tell whether the object is big, small, important or familiar.

2. Choose a or an by the next sound

Say the word immediately after the gap. If its first sound is a vowel sound, use an: an orange, an egg, an umbrella. If it starts with a consonant sound, use a: a table, a pencil, a banana.



A comes before a consonant sound and an before a vowel sound: a uniform but an hour.

Spelling is a useful clue, but sound decides. Hour has a silent h in standard pronunciation, so an hour is natural. Uniform begins with the consonant sound heard at the start of you, so a uniform is natural. One also starts with a "w" sound: a one-day trip.

Listen to the phrase as you would actually say it. Do not teach "an before every written vowel" as an absolute rule. The examples hour and uniform show why that shortcut fails.

3. An adjective can change the article

Compare a bag and an old bag. Bag has not changed, but the next spoken word has. Old begins with a vowel sound, so an fits. Compare an apple and a green apple: green begins with a consonant sound.

Keep the article at the start of the noun phrase. "An unusually heavy box" takes an because unusually is the next spoken word. At Grade 4, begin with one clear adjective before using longer phrases.

When correcting a sentence, read the whole phrase aloud rather than looking only at the final noun. Underline the word directly after the article and explain its first sound. That gives a repeatable method for a new example.

4. Use the when the reader can tell which one

Read: "I found a shell. The shell had a pink stripe." The first sentence introduces a shell. The second refers back to that same shell, now identifiable to the reader. This is one common reason for the, not the only reason.



A shell introduces an object; the shell refers back to the object the reader now knows.

A phrase can identify something on its first mention: "Please pass the book beside your elbow." The shared situation and the description tell the listener which book. Do not insist that a noun must appear earlier before the can be used.

The works with singular and plural nouns and with uncountable nouns when the reference is identifiable: the cup, the cups on the tray, the water in this bottle. Ask "Which one or which group?" and look for the shared clue.

5. Some sentences need no article

"Dogs need water" is a general statement about dogs and water. Dogs is plural and water is uncountable in this use. Do not put a before either word. "The dogs in our garden need the water in that bowl" identifies a particular group and a particular supply.

To count an amount of an uncountable substance, name a unit or container: a glass of water, a bowl of rice, two pieces of advice. The article belongs with glass, bowl or piece. The material word is not suddenly being counted in the same way as a pencil.

Names usually do not take an article: Asha lives in Delhi. Some geographical and institutional names follow different conventions; learn those in context rather than adding the before every place name. This guide focuses on ordinary noun phrases, not every naming exception.

6. Check meaning before marking an answer wrong

Without context, "I saw a dog" and "I saw the dog" can both be correct. The first introduces a dog; the second assumes the listener can identify it. A good exercise supplies enough context or accepts a justified alternative.

Use a three-question routine: Is the noun singular and countable in this use? Can the reader identify the intended thing? If a or an is needed, what sound comes next? This connects grammar to meaning instead of treating it as a spelling game.

For independent writing, ask for a two-sentence story that first introduces something and then refers back to it. Later change the adjective and check the article again. For example, change a box to an empty box while keeping the same story.

5 worked examples with reasoning

1. Choose "a" or "an": ___ honest answer.

1. Honest has a silent h in standard pronunciation.

2. The next sound is a vowel sound.

3. Write an honest answer.

2. Complete: "I bought ___ kite. ___ kite is blue."

1. The first sentence introduces one non-specific kite: a kite.

2. The second refers to that same kite, now known.

3. I bought a kite. The kite is blue.

3. Change "a basket" by adding the adjective empty.

1. The new phrase is article + empty + basket.

2. Empty starts with a vowel sound.

3. Write an empty basket.

4. Repair "She gave me an advice."

1. Advice is uncountable in this use.

2. Use some advice, or count a unit: a piece of advice.

3. Do not choose a merely because advice starts with a different letter.

5. Can "Open the window" be correct on the first mention?

1. Yes, if the shared situation makes the window identifiable.

2. For example, the speaker points to the one closed window beside the listener.

3. Earlier mention is not required when another clear clue identifies it.

Use the ideas without looking at the notes

Write three new phrases: one that uses a, one that uses an and one that uses the. Explain the sound or the shared clue for each. Then write a general plural statement with no article.

Common questions

Is an used before every vowel letter?

No. Sound decides: a uniform begins with a consonant sound, while an hour begins with a vowel sound.

Can the be used before a plural noun?

Yes: the books on the desk identifies a particular group.

Does the always mean the noun was mentioned earlier?

No. A shared situation or identifying phrase can make the reference clear on its first mention.

Why do we say an old car but a car?

The word immediately after the article changes from car to old, so the initial sound changes.

Is every article gap limited to one answer?

No. Some require more context. A and the can express different valid meanings.

Connect your learning

- Understand naming words and particular names
- Choose verbs that match the subject
- Build and revise a clear sentence

Ask about guided English learning if your child needs help explaining these ideas.

About this guide

Original explanations, examples, diagrams and practice by BananaLearn. The grade label indicates the intended learning level; this is not an official textbook extract or exam paper.

A, an and the for Grade 4

Practice worksheet - English · Grade 4

Name: _____ Date: _____

Show your working. Answers and explanations follow on a separate page.

Try each task before opening its answer. Give an example or reason, not only a label.

Write an answer and your reason before opening the explanation. Check the reasoning as well as the final answer.

1. Choose a or an: ___ elephant.

2. Choose a or an: ___ university.

3. Choose a or an: ___ hour.

4. Choose a or an: ___ red umbrella.

5. Choose a or an: ___ old pencil.

6. I found ___ coin. ___ coin was under my chair.

7. Choose the usual article: Please pass ___ bowl beside your hand.

8. For a general statement, write a, an, the or no article: ___ cats need food.

9. Repair "I drank a water" using a container.

10. Repair "I opened a my book."

11. Choose a or an: ___ one-way road.

12. Can "I saw ___ bird" have more than one correct answer without context?

13. Repair "an apples" without making it singular.

14. Write two sentences introducing a box and then referring back to it.

15. Change "an orange" to include the adjective small.

16. Why is checking the first letter alone unreliable?

Answers and explanations

Answer key - English · Grade 4

A, an and the for Grade 4

1. An elephant.

Elephant begins with a vowel sound.

2. A university.

University begins with a "y" consonant sound.

3. An hour.

The h is silent in standard pronunciation.

4. A red umbrella.

The next sound belongs to red, not umbrella.

5. An old pencil.

Old begins with a vowel sound.

6. A coin; the coin.

Introduce one coin, then refer back to it.

7. The bowl.

The description identifies the intended bowl.

8. No article.

The sentence refers to cats generally.

9. I drank a glass of water.

Glass is the singular countable container.

10. I opened my book.

Do not put a before the determiner my.

11. A one-way road.

One begins with a "w" sound.

12. Yes: a bird or the bird.

A introduces it; the assumes an identifiable bird.

13. Apples, some apples or the apples, depending on meaning.

A and an do not directly introduce plural countable nouns.

14. For example: I found a box. The box held buttons.

First introduce the object; then use the known reference.

15. A small orange.

Small supplies the next consonant sound.

16. The first spoken sound can differ from the written letter.

An hour and a uniform show the two directions of the mismatch.