

English A1 · a, an and plurals

Beginner English for Chinese speakers; classroom examples, not official exam items.

The ticket rule

A singular countable noun in English never stands naked: it needs a ticket, and the ticket is a or an.

Listen, don't read

The sound that follows	Use	Examples
a consonant sound	a	a book, a university
a vowel sound	an	an apple, an hour

Use the evidence

a university begins with "yoo" — a consonant sound in a vowel's costume.

Your turn: ear or eye

Your turn

Which pair is correct?

- ☐ A. a hour, an university
- ☐ B. an hour, a university
- ☐ C. an hour, an university
- ☐ D. a hour, a university

The -s dances

Ending	The dance	Example
-s, -sh, -ch, -x	add -es	watch → watches
consonant + y	y → ies	city → cities
-f / -fe	f → ves	knife → knives
vowel + y	just add -s	day → days

Use the evidence

The -es dance adds a syllable: watch is one beat, watches is two.

The irregulars refuse to dance

Old friends, old rules

child → children · person → people

man → men · woman → women · foot → feet · tooth → teeth

one sheep, two sheep — the sheep does not change. The sheep does not care.

One ticket, or no ticket

Singular: ticket required

I have a cat. She is a doctor.

Never: I have cat.

Plural or general: no ticket

I like cats. Dogs are friendly.

Never: a books, or I like a music.

Your turn: the missing ticket

Your turn

Which sentence is correct?

- A. I am student.
- B. I am a student.
- C. I am an student.
- D. I am the student always.

Sound beats spelling

- 1 **The trap** an follows the sound, not the first letter.
- 2 **Silent h** an honest boy — the h is silent.
- 3 **The "yoo" words** a European city, a useful book.

Decision

When in doubt, say it aloud; the ear is the teacher.

Say it aloud

Describe your bag: a pen, an eraser, three books.



Be honest: There is an apple in my bag. It has been there a while.



Take a side: I like cats, but I am a dog person.



Ten fast ones: ear, university, hour, orange, umbrella — a or an?

Check yourself

- an apple — a vowel sound takes an.
- a university — "yoo" is a consonant sound; the ear rules.
- watch → watches; child → children; sheep → sheep.
- I am a student — the ticket is not optional.