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the rule that many people vaguely remember is that one uses a if the word that follows it begins with a consonant and one uses an if the following word begins with a vowel the patterns that determine which article a or an is conventionally used before a given word are based on phonetics but the patterns exist in writing as well as speech when preceding a consonant sound a is used a cake a slice of cake a is used before words that begin with a consonant sound as in i own a dog or she was riding a unicycle an is used before words with a vowel sound as in he ate an apple or it has been an honor here s the secret to making the rule work the rule applies to the sound of the letter beginning the word not just the letter itself the way we say the word will determine whether or not we use a or an if the word begins with a vowel sound you must use an if it begins with a consonant sound you must use a a is used before a noun that starts with a consonant sound e g s t v an is used before a noun that starts with a vowel sound e g a o i note that the rule is not whether they start with a consonant or vowel but whether they start with a consonant or vowel sound we use the indefinite article a an with singular nouns when the listener reader does not know exactly which one we are referring to police are searching for a 14 year old girl we also use it to show that the person or thing is one of a group she is a pupil at london road school the choice of article is based upon the phonetic sound quality of the first letter in a word not on the orthographic written representation of the letter if the first letter makes a vowel type sound you use an if the first letter would make a consonant type sound you use a a an before a noun shows that what is referred to is not already known to the speaker listener writer and or reader it is the indefinite article do you have a car a do you live in a house b no actually i live in an apartment as we ve pointed out using a or an will depend on the first letter of the next word we will use a when the first letter of the next word has a consonant sound including y and w we will use an when the first letter of the next word has a vowel sound a and an are two forms of the same word so you really can t confuse their meaning just remember choosing the right article is all about the first sound not the first letter of the noun or adjective that follows the article vowel sounds 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 if a word starts with a consonant sound use a answer a and an are two different forms of the same word the indefinite article a that is used before noun phrases use a when the noun or adjective that comes next begins with a consonant sound use an when the noun or adjective that comes next begins with a vowel sound remember that what matters is the pronunciation not the spelling a utopia yoo toe pe a an honor ah ner when you come across these ignore what the first letter is and just listen to the sound that it makes say the word out loud if it sounds as if it is beginning with a consonant sound use a when to say a or an the indefinite article is a or an but how do we know when to say a and when to say an the rule is really very simple it depends on the sound at the start of the following word it does not depend on the way we write the following word it depends on the way we say it use a or an before an abbreviation depending on how it is pronounced not written if it starts with a consonant sound use a if it starts with a vowel sound use an the sound of a word s first letter determines whether to use an or a if the word starts with a vowel sound you should use an if it starts with a consonant sound you should use a for example buy a house in an hour at that sound we create high quality drum sample libraries that help producers make the music that makes the charts

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