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Scientific Writing Resources

Words and phrases that can confuse

Indefinite Article





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We all know that we use **A** before a word that begins with a consonant, and **AN** when the word begins with a vowel. But English spelling and pronunciation are not so easy, so, let's have a look, and listen, to these.

1: the four words that begin with a mute H

(hour – heir – honour – honest) so –

An honest man

2: pronunciation - words

Underground (sounds like it begins with an “A”) so –

An underground

Uniform (sounds like it begins with a “U”) so –

A uniform

3: pronunciation – numbers

1 (sounds like it begins with a “W”) so –

A 1-year follow-up

8 (sounds like it begins with an “A”) so –

An 8-week programme



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4: problems

Abbreviations

SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome)

Now, if we pronounce this as letters: S-A-R-S.

Then the first letter, "S" sounds like it begins with an "E" so –

An SARS

However, if we pronounce this as a word then the first letter, "S" sounds like it begins with an "S" so –

A SARS

This is also true of **MRSA** that was pronounced as individual letters in the past, but now is pronounced as a single word.

It is all about "THE SOUND"

A before words that start with a **consonant** sound

An before words that start with a **vowel** sound
