



A or An? Why the First Sound Matters More Than the First Letter

S06E20 | For teachers to adapt to their learners

Teaching focus

Choose an before a vowel sound and a before a consonant sound. Listen to the beginning of the next spoken word, even when the spelling suggests a different answer.

Our suggested routine

1. Mini-lesson: A or an? Listen to the first sound Quick rule: use a before a consonant sound and an before a vowel sound. Listen to the word after the article: a university begins with /j/ ("y"), while hour begins with a vowel sound because its h is silent. Try it: Read these aloud. Learners call "a" or "an", then say the whole phrase: ___ university; ___ hour; ___ European city; ___ MBA student. Ask: "What sound did you hear first?" Check: a university; an hour; a European city; an MBA student. Learners earn a point for the correct article and another for explaining the first sound.

After the attempt

What could learners do? What needed another model or a smaller step? Choose one useful adjustment and try the task again.

Notes for our next lesson

Read the full teaching article and listen to the episode at howtoenglishpod.com