

English Grammar: 'a' vs 'one'

The words 'a', 'an' and 'one' can be translated to 'um' or 'uma' in Portuguese. They can sometimes be interchanged, but they can change the emphasis. Look at the examples below.

1) The article 'a'/'an'

When we use the article 'a' or 'an', we talk about a singular thing, but the "thing" is important. For example:

- I bought **a** book last week. (*It's the **book** that I want to talk about.*)
- John found **a** key in the street yesterday. (*It's the **object** that is interesting.*)
- Would you like **an** egg for breakfast? (*It's the **food** that is important.*)
- We bought **a** house yesterday. (*It's the **house** that is I want to talk about.*)
- I need **an** engineer to help me build a house. (*It's the **engineer** that is relevant.*)

2) The number 'one'

When we use the number 'one', we talk about a singular thing, but the "quantity" is important. For example:

- I bought **one** book last week. (*It's the **quantity** that I want to talk about.*)
- John has **one** key on his key-chain. (*It's the **quantity** that is interesting.*)
- The sheikh bought **one** house yesterday. (*It's the **quantity** that is relevant.*)
- A: How many kids do you have? B: **One**.

Exercise: Complete the sentences below with 'a' or 'one':

1. I need _____ break. I'm exhausted.
2. Do you want _____ drink? Yes, please!
3. We only have _____ car, but we need another for my wife.
4. He only speaks _____ language – his native tongue!
5. A: Let's play _____ game of football. B: Great idea!
6. Yesterday, we didn't have much free time, so we only played _____ game of chess.
7. I want to live my life _____ day at _____ time.
8. _____ day, I really want to visit Rome.
9. Can you please give me _____ hand?
10. Here is my shopping list: _____ kg of bananas, _____ cabbage and _____ carton of milk.