

Grammar into Pronunciation: a/an, the and the Schwa

Context: Low intermediate students preparing for a conversation about making a plan.

LESSON

1. **Raise awareness of the sound:** Introduce the schwa sound as it is used in articles *a, an*. Put the following table on the projector. Then read aloud so they can hear them read individually and in normal speech. Read column B again and let them repeat.

A	B
It's a good idea.	It'sa good idea
Spend a lot of money	spenda lotta money.
Get a coffee	getta coffee
Have an idea	Havan idea

2. **Raise awareness of the grammar:** Use the next chart to show the pattern of a/an in front of singular nouns. They naturally appear when people are making suggestions for a night out. Draw students attention to the vowel sounds before an.

a	an
Let's see a movie.	I have an idea
We need to find a restaurant.	How about an early dinner?
We'll have a good time.	We can take an uber downtown.

3. **Practice saying and hearing the schwa in a/an.** Make copies of the following, one for each student. Practice noticing the schwa in spoken English in three ways.
 - a. Say one of the sentences and have students say the letter of the column they hear.
 - b. Drill both sides to help students with the sounds.
 - c. Have students practice in pairs. Have partner A say one of the sentences, and partner B say the letter of the column they hear. Then switch.

A schwa	B no schwa
1. I like a good soup.	I like my new group.
2. We'll meet a new friend.	We'll see Tamu's friend.
3. It's a film about science.	That's not really science.
4. That's a good plan.	That's my friend Stan.
5. Let's take a car.	Let's play guitar.
6. Can you buy a ticket there?	Can we buy our tickets there?
7. We'll have a fun night.	We'll have food tonight.
8. Should we meet in an hour or two?	Should we meet in our house or yours?

4. **Practice the Schwa in a dialog.** Make copies of the following gap fill, one for each student, and use it two ways.
 - a. Have students use the grammar rules to decide whether to use a/an or X.
 - b. Read the two parts so students can check their work.
 - c. Have students read the dialog, paying attention to the sound of the schwa.

Van: We don't have _____ class tonight. Let's go out.

Grimilda: That's _____ good idea. Where do you want **to** go?

Van: How about _____ restaurant?

Grimilda: Hmm. I hope you aren't thinking about _____ expensive place. I don't want to spend _____ lot of money.

Van: Okay, how about _____ coffee shop?

Grimilda: I'd like some _____ exercise. What do you think about going to the gym.

Van: Really? _____ exercise? I'll go with you, but I won't work out. I'll just watch!

Grimilda: That's not right. Let's do something together.

Van: Do you want **to** see _____ movie?

Grimilda: Sure, There's _____ funny one about college students.

Van: Okay, let's look online and check. Maybe there's one at _____ good time, and we can eat first.

SCRIPT

Van: We don't have **X** class tonight. Let's go out.

Grimilda: That's **a** good idea. Where do you want **to** go?

Van: How about **a** restaurant?

Grimilda: Hmm. I hope you aren't thinking about **an** expensive place. I don't want to spend **a** lot of money.

Van: Okay, how about **a** coffee shop?

Grimilda: I'd could go for some **X** exercise. What do you think about going to the gym?

Van: Really? **X** exercise? I'll go with you, but I won't work out. I'll just watch!

Grimilda: That's not right. Let's do something together.

Van: Do you want to see **a** movie?

Grimilda: Sure, There's **a** funny one about college students.

Van: Okay, let's look online and check. Maybe there's one at **a** good time, and we can eat first.

5. Practice on their own. Have students choose from a list of possible things to do and then practice making suggestions and responding to suggestions about things to do.

Partner A		Partner B	
Do you want to see	a movie? a play? An outdoor concert?	That sounds like	a lot of fun. A good plan An excellent idea
Do you want to go to	a restaurant? a soccer game? a party?	I'd love to. Can I bring	a friend a classmate?