

English nouns

Classification:

- **Count nouns**
- **Uncount nouns**
- **Group nouns**
- **Things with two parts**

Count nouns have two forms: **singular** and **plural**.

Singular count nouns refer to **one** person or thing:

a teacher a book a wish an idea

Singular count nouns cannot be used alone. They must have a **determiner**:

the English teacher that book a wish my latest idea

We can use some **quantifiers** with count nouns:

There were **a lot of** people.

How **many** articles have you written?

She has got very **few** friends.

I know **a few** famous actors.

Plural count nouns

Plural count nouns refer to **more** than one person or thing:

We usually add –s to make a plural noun:

book > books
school > schools
friend > friends

We add –es to nouns ending in –s, –ch, –sh, –ss, –x and –o:

class > classes
watch > watches
gas > gases
wish > wishes
box > boxes
potato > potatoes
tomato > tomatoes
hero > heroes
torpedo > torpedoes
veto > vetoes (exceptions: pianos, cantos, photos, zeros)

When a noun ends in a consonant and –y, we make the plural with –ies:

lady > ladies
country > countries
party > parties

If a noun ends in a vowel and -y, we simply add -s:

boy > boys
day > days
play > plays

If a noun ends in -f and -fe, we make plural with -ves

knife > knives
life > lives
wife > wives
calf > calves
leaf > leaves (exceptions: roofs, proofs)

Some common nouns have irregular plurals:

man > men
woman > women
child > children
person > people
foot > feet
goose > geese
louse > lice
mouse > mice
tooth > teeth

Uncount nouns (mass nouns)

Some nouns in English are **uncount** nouns. We do **not** use uncount nouns in the **plural** and we do **not** use them with the **indefinite** article **a/an**:

We ate a lot of food. (NOT foods)

We bought some new furniture. (NOT furnitures)

That's useful information. (NOT a useful information)

We can use some **quantifiers** with uncount nouns:

He gave me **some** useful advice.

They gave us **a lot of** information.

How **much** money have you got?

I've got **little** experience.

There is still **a little** time left.

Uncount nouns often refer to:

Substances: food, water, wine, salt, bread, iron

Human feelings or qualities: anger, cruelty, happiness, honesty, pride

Activities: help, sleep, travel, work

Abstract ideas: beauty, death, fun, life

Common uncount nouns

Some common nouns in English like information are uncount nouns even though they have plurals in other languages. Examples of uncount nouns:

advice	accommodation	baggage	equipment
furniture	homework	knowledge	luggage/baggage
machinery	money	news	traffic
behaviour	bread	chaos	luck
permission	progress	scenery	work
hair	information		

Let me give you some advice.
How much luggage have you got?

If we want to make these things countable, we use expressions like:

a piece of ...	a bit of ...	an item of ...
pieces of ...	bits of ...	items of ...

Let me give you **a piece of** advice.
That's **a useful piece of** equipment.
We bought **a few bits** of furniture for the new apartment.
She had **six separate items** of luggage.

However, accommodation, money and traffic cannot be made countable in this way. We need to use **other** expressions:

I've lived in three flats/apartments. (NOT bits of accommodation)
Smith received three large sums of money. (NOT pieces of money)
We got stuck in two traffic jams. (NOT pieces of traffic)

Examples of synonymous count and uncount nouns

Countable	Uncountable
dollar	money
song	music
suitcase	luggage

Countable	Uncountable
table	furniture
battery	electricity
bottle	wine
report	information
day	weather
tip	advice
journey	travel
job	work
view	scenery

In certain situations uncount nouns can be used as count nouns:

I'd like a coffee, please. = I'd like a [cup of] coffee.

May I have a white wine? = May I have a [glass of] white wine?

They sell a lot of coffees. = They sell a lot of [different kinds of] coffee.

I prefer white wines to red. = I prefer [different kinds of] white wine to red.

They had over twenty cheeses. = They had over twenty [types of] cheese.

This is an excellent soft cheese. = This [kind of] soft cheese is excellent.

There is a hair in my soup. = One [piece] of hair.

NOTE! Experiences = things that happened to me x experience = practice = uncount

Group nouns

Some nouns refer to groups of people, animals or things:

army	audience	committee	company
crew	enemy	family	flock
gang	government	group	herd
public	regiment	staff	team

We can use these group nouns either as singular nouns or as plural nouns:

My family is very dear to me.

I have a large family. They are very dear to me. = The members of my family ...

The government is very unpopular.

The government are always changing their minds.

Sometimes we think of the group as a single thing:

The audience always enjoys the show.

The group consists of two men and three women.

Sometimes we think of the group as several individuals:

The audience clapped their hands.

The largest group are the boys.

The names of many organisations and teams are also group nouns, but they are usually plural in spoken English:

Barcelona are winning 2–0.

The United Oil Company are putting prices up by 12 per cent.

and **the police is always plural:**

The police are offering a £5,000 reward.

Things with two parts

A few plural nouns refer to things that have two parts. They have no singular form. These are always things we wear:

glasses/spectacles	trousers	shorts
pyjamas	pants	boxers
tights	jeans	knickers

Those trousers are too long.

or implements:

pliers	scissors	binoculars	pincers/tweezers
--------	----------	------------	------------------

These binoculars were very expensive.

To make it clear we are talking about one of these items, we use a pair of ...:

I need a new pair of spectacles.
I've bought a pair of blue jeans.

If we want to talk about more than one, we use pairs of ...:
We've got three pairs of scissors, but they are all blunt.
I always carry two pairs of binoculars.

Some nouns have the same form in their singular and plural number, usually those referring to animals: e.g. sheep, deer, fish.