



## Countable & Uncountable Nouns: Definitions, Rules & Examples

### What are Countable and Uncountable Nouns?

Countable nouns are things we can count (like *books* or *apples*). They have both singular and plural forms (*one apple, two apples*).

Uncountable nouns are things or abstract concepts that we can't count (like *milk* or *air*) and they usually don't use articles or plural forms. We can't say '*a milk*' or '*airs*'.

Sometimes there's not much logic to whether a noun is countable or uncountable. For example:

- *work* is uncountable, but *job* is countable
- *advice* is uncountable, but *suggestion* is countable
- *feedback* is uncountable, but *comment* is countable
- *trip* is countable, but *travel* is uncountable
- *word* is countable, but *vocabulary* is uncountable
- *study* is countable, but *research* is uncountable

Sometimes, a noun is even different in US English and UK English, like 'Lego' or 'accommodation' (both uncountable in the UK, but countable in the US).

It's really important to know if a noun is countable or uncountable, because it changes how we use it in a sentence.

### Countable Nouns

Countable nouns are things that we can count like 'table', 'apple' or 'boy'. We usually add an 's' to the noun to make a plural:

- Table → **Tables**
- Apple → **Apples**
- Boy → **Boys**



We use singular verbs with singular countable nouns, and plural verbs with plural countable nouns.

Singular countable nouns → **singular verb**:

- A child **is** playing outside.
- The book **was** interesting.
- The dog **eats** fast.

Plural countable nouns → **plural verb**:

- The children **are** playing outside.
- The books **were** interesting.
- The dogs **eat** fast.

## Uncountable Nouns

On the other hand, uncountable nouns are nouns that we can't count, like 'love', 'rice' or 'water'.

They don't have a plural form, so we can't add 's' to them. We also don't use 'a' or 'an' with uncountable nouns. So we can't say:

- ~~Two rices~~
- ~~Three new vocabularies~~
- A progress

We always use uncountable nouns with a singular verb. For example:

- Love **makes** the world go round.
- Friendship **is** the most important thing in the world.
- Fear **stops** you from making hard decisions.
- Advice **helps** people make decisions.



Be careful NOT to use plural verbs with uncountable nouns because the noun ends with an 's' and looks plural. For example:

- mathematics
- physics
- economics
- politics
- linguistics
- statistics
- news
- measles
- diabetes
- darts
- dominoes
- series
- species

Here are some kinds of nouns that are often uncountable:

- **Abstract nouns (nouns that talk about ideas):** love, happiness, peace, democracy.
- **Subjects from school or university:** Maths, French, history.
- **Materials:** metal, wood, plastic.
- **Liquids:** water, coffee, milk.
- **Gases:** air, oxygen, carbon dioxide.
- **Things that are made up of lots of small pieces:** sand, rice, salt.



## Words That Can Be Both Countable and Uncountable

We can use many, many words in both an uncountable way and a countable way.

This is especially true of uncountable food and drink, such as 'coffee' or 'yoghurt'. When we're talking in general about coffee or yoghurt, the words are uncountable. But we can use them in a countable way when we mean 'one cup of' or 'one pot of':

- Uncountable: **Coffee** is my favourite drink.
- Countable: Could you buy two **coffees** and two teas, please?
- Uncountable: My children eat a lot of **yoghurt**.
- Countable: I bought a pack of six **yoghurts**.

Other words that act like this include: water, juice, salad, curry and cake.

Another way that we use uncountable nouns in a countable way is when we use the word to mean 'a kind of' or 'a type of':

- Uncountable: She loves **cheese**.
- Countable: That shop sells lots of **cheeses** (= different kinds of cheese).

Other words that can be used in this way include jam, wood, plastic, bread, metal and fabric.

There are a few words that change their meaning depending on if we use them in a countable way or an uncountable way. For example:

### **Hair**

Countable = one hair

- Urgh! There's **a hair** in my food!

Uncountable = all the hair on a person's head.

- She has very beautiful **hair**.



## Paper

Countable = a newspaper

- I bought all the **papers** this morning.

Uncountable = paper in general

- Could you give me some **paper** to write on?

## Light

Countable = a single lamp or light bulb

- The Christmas tree was covered in **lights**.

Uncountable = light in general or as a metaphor

- The room was full of **light**.

## Experience

Countable = one event

- I travelled to Thailand and it was a really great **experience**.

Uncountable = when you've done something for a long time

- She has a lot of **experience** with children.



## Articles and Determiners with Countable and Uncountable Nouns

### Articles and Determiners with Countable Nouns

Countable nouns are things we can count, and they can be singular or plural.

#### Singular Countable Nouns

- |             |                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>a/an</b> | We can use 'a/an' with singular countable nouns. We don't usually use 'no article'.                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I have <b>a</b> question.</li><li>• NOT: <del>I have question.</del></li><br/><li>• She had <b>an</b> idea.</li><li>• NOT: <del>She had idea.</del></li></ul> |
| <b>the</b>  | We can also use 'the' when the countable noun is specific or the listener already knows what we're talking about. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>The</b> film was so inspiring.</li><li>• <b>The</b> idea was lovely!</li></ul>                                                                             |

#### Plural Countable Nouns

- |                          |                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>no article</b><br>(Ø) | We can use 'no article' with plural nouns when we talk about something in general. We don't use 'a/an' with plural nouns. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I like Ø apples.</li><li>• NOT: <del>I like an apples.</del></li><br/><li>• They sell Ø books in that shop.</li><li>• NOT: <del>They sell a books in that shop.</del></li></ul> |
| <b>the</b>               | We can also use 'the' when the plural noun is specific or the listener already knows what we're talking about.            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>The</b> flowers in your garden are beautiful.</li><li>• <b>The</b> chocolates from that shop are amazing.</li></ul>                                                          |
| <b>some</b>              | We use 'some' in positive sentences to talk about a quantity that isn't exact.                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We made <b>some</b> mistakes.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                         |

<b>any</b>	We use 'any' with negatives and questions to talk about a quantity that isn't exact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There aren't <b>any</b> chairs.</li> </ul>
<b>a few</b>	We use 'a few' in positive sentences to talk about a small amount.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were <b>a few</b> problems.</li> </ul>
<b>few</b>	We use 'few' in positive sentences to mean 'almost nothing'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There have been <b>few</b> problems with the new system, thankfully!</li> </ul>
<b>a lot of / lots of</b>	We use 'a lot of/ lots of' in positive sentences to talk about a big quantity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We invited <b>a lot of</b> people.</li> <li>• There are <b>lots of</b> dishes on the menu.</li> </ul>
<b>many</b>	We use 'many' in negative sentences to say we don't have a lot of those things.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There aren't <b>many</b> teachers at the school.</li> </ul>
<b>how many</b>	We use 'how many' in questions to ask about the specific amount.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>How many</b> students are in the class?</li> </ul>

### Articles and Determiners with Uncountable Nouns

<b>no article (Ø)</b>	We use 'no article' with uncountable nouns in general statements. We don't use 'a/an'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She gave me <b>Ø</b> advice about a job interview.</li> <li>• I need <b>Ø</b> information about the course.</li> <li>• NOT: <del>We made a progress today.</del></li> </ul>
<b>the</b>	We can also use 'the' when the countable noun is specific or the listener already knows what we're talking about.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The</b> water in Madrid tastes so good.</li> <li>• <b>The</b> bakery you recommended was amazing.</li> </ul>
<b>some</b>	We use 'some' in positive sentences to talk about a quantity that isn't exact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have <b>some</b> money to take on holiday.</li> </ul>

<b>any</b>	We use 'any' with negatives and questions to talk about a quantity that isn't exact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There isn't <b>any</b> pasta in the cupboard.</li> </ul>
<b>a little / a bit of</b>	We use 'a little' in positive sentences to talk about a small amount.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I need <b>a little</b> help, please.</li> <li>• Can I give you <b>a bit of</b> advice?</li> </ul>
<b>little</b>	We use 'little' in positive sentences to mean 'almost nothing'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sorry, I have <b>little</b> money.</li> </ul>
<b>a lot of / lots of</b>	We use 'a lot of/ lots of' in positive sentences to talk about a big quantity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You must have <b>lots of</b> patience to be a good teacher.</li> <li>• I'll have <b>a lot of</b> free time this summer.</li> </ul>
<b>much</b>	We use 'much' in negative sentences to say we don't have a lot of those things.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't have <b>much</b> time today.</li> </ul>
<b>how much</b>	We use 'how much' in questions to ask about the specific amount.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>How much</b> sugar shall I put in?</li> </ul>



## Quantity Words with Uncountable Nouns

With countable nouns, we can say how many of them we mean. So, we can say "two apples" or "a few cars".

However, it's more difficult to be specific with uncountable or plural nouns, but we can do it with the structure 'a + measure noun + of + noun'. We can say "a packet of sugar" rather than "some sugar" because it's more specific. Equally we might say, "a group of people" instead of just "some people" because it gives us a clearer idea of how many people there are.

### Containers

- a cup of tea
- a glass of milk
- a packet of sugar
- a sack of rice
- a tin of fruit
- a jar of jam
- a tube of toothpaste
- a bottle of water

### Measurements

- a kilo of flour
- a gram of meat
- five pounds of beef
- two metres of fabric
- ten litres of petrol
- a pint of beer
- three spoonfuls of sugar
- a pinch of salt

### Parts of something

- a piece of cheese/chocolate/plastic/chalk
- a lump of coal/sugar
- a slice of bread/cake/pizza
- a sheet/piece of paper
- a bar of soap/chocolate
- a loaf of bread

- a grain of sand/rice
- an item of furniture
- a piece of advice/information

## Quantity Words with Countable Nouns

We can also do this with countable nouns, but they are optional and add extra meaning. Here are some more examples:

### Groups

- a group of people
- a crowd of tourists
- a team of players
- a bunch of flowers

### Arrangement

- a row of houses
- a line of cars
- a pile of books
- a stack of chairs
- a series of events

### Containers

- a box of chocolates
- a bag of apples
- a basket of eggs
- a tray of sandwiches



## Common Mistakes

Some nouns are countable in other languages but uncountable in English, so students often make mistakes with them. Here are some of the most common examples:

### Advice

- NOT: She gave me ~~an advice~~.
- Correct: She gave me **some / a bit of / a piece of / lots of advice**.

### Accommodation

- NOT: There ~~are a lot of accommodations~~ in the mountains.
- Correct: There **is a lot of accommodation** in the mountains.

### Equipment

- NOT: ~~A new equipment~~ would fix this problem.
- Correct: **Some new equipment** would fix this problem.

### Evidence

- NOT: We don't have ~~an evidence~~ to prove it.
- Correct: We don't have **any evidence** to prove it.

### Furniture

- NOT: I really need to buy some new ~~furnitures~~ for my new flat.
- Correct: I really need to buy some new **furniture** for my new flat.

### Homework

- NOT: I have a lot of ~~homeworks~~ today.
- Correct: I have a lot of **homework** today.

### Information

- NOT: I need ~~an information~~ about visiting times.
- Correct: I need **some information** about visiting times.



## Knowledge

- NOT: You have ~~so many knowledges~~ of history!
- You have **so much knowledge** of history!

## Luggage

- NOT: I need to get to the airport early to check my ~~luggages~~ in.
- Correct: I need to get to the airport early to check my **luggage** in.

## News

- NOT: The news ~~are~~ interesting today.
- Correct: The news **is** interesting today.

## Spaghetti

- NOT: Can we have ~~spaghettis~~ for dinner?
- Correct: Can we have **spaghetti** for dinner?

## Work

- NOT: I don't have ~~many works~~ left.
- Correct: I don't have **much work** left.

## Conclusion

To summarise, remember that:

- Countable nouns are things we can count (*one book, two apples*) and have singular and plural forms.
- Uncountable nouns are things or concepts we can't count (*advice, water, furniture*) and don't take plural forms or 'a/an.' We can, however, use articles like *some, any, much, a lot of* and *a bit of* with uncountable nouns.
- We can also use measure words or phrases like *a piece of, a tin of* or *a litre of* to make uncountable or plural noun "countable."
- Some words are countable in one context and uncountable in another (e.g., *coffee, cheese, experience, hair*).
- Some nouns look plural but are uncountable (e.g., *news, mathematics*).