



Nouns Explanation

What is a Noun?

A noun names a person, a place, an animal, a thing, or an idea. Nouns can be plural or singular and can be the subject or object of a verb. For example:

- The **books** are on the **table**.
- **Love** is all you need.
- **John** is in the **garden**.
- **London** is lovely in the **summer**.

Sometimes, it's difficult to know if a word is a noun or another part of speech. For example, in English, the word 'love' can be a noun and it can be a verb. We need to look at how the word is used in the sentence to work out what part of speech it is.

Here are some tips:

- Nouns are often the subject or object of a verb.
- Nouns often come after an article like 'a' or 'the'.
- Nouns often come after an adjective like 'red' or 'pretty' or 'big'.
- Nouns are often used with a determiner like 'this' or 'those'.

Common and Proper Nouns

First, we have proper nouns and common nouns.

Proper nouns are the names of:

- people (*Julie, Mr Johnson*)
- places (*Paris, Africa, California*)
- organisations (*Coca Cola, the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford University*)
- works of art (*the Mona Lisa*)
- days of the week (*Monday, Sunday*)
- months (*June, October*)
- festivals (*Christmas, Ramadan*)



In English, proper nouns usually have capital letters at the beginning of the word.

Common nouns are everything else. Words like *'book'*, *'table'*, *'mountain'*, *'love'* and *'money'* are all common nouns.

Concrete and Abstract Nouns

We also have concrete and abstract nouns. Concrete nouns are things we can see, hear, touch, smell and taste. For example:

- **See:** sand, sea, mountains.
- **Hear:** music, noise, animals.
- **Touch:** rain, fabric.
- **Smell / taste:** apples, chocolate, coffee.

Abstract nouns talk about feelings, qualities, ideas and concepts, or states and experiences. You can't see or touch them. Here are some examples:

- **Feelings:** fear, anger, sadness, excitement, jealousy.
- **Qualities:** honesty, kindness, beauty, patience, intelligence.
- **Ideas:** freedom, justice, knowledge, education, religion.
- **States / experiences:** health, sickness, death, peace, age, knowledge, success.



Countable and Uncountable Nouns

There are two types of common noun. These are countable nouns and uncountable nouns. 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 are things which can be counted like *'table', 'apple'* or *'boy'*. They usually change their form when we make a plural (they often add an 's'), and can be used with either a singular or a plural verb: *one book falls, two books fall*.

On the other hand, uncountable nouns are usually things which can't easily be counted, like *'love', 'rice'* or *'water'*. Uncountable nouns do not make a plural or change their form, and they are always used with a singular verb. We can't say ~~one rice, two rice~~.

Here's a list of some uncountable nouns that we often use:

advice	Could you give me some advice?
dust	The old table was covered with dust.
electricity	Electricity runs through this wire.
equipment	Could you give me a list of the equipment we need for the trip?
evidence	What evidence is there against John?
fog	I could hardly see because of the thick fog.
fun	We had a lot of fun at the party.
furniture	I really need to buy some new furniture for my new flat.
happiness	How can we increase our happiness?
help	The teacher would like some help with moving the chairs.
homework	How much homework do you get?
information	Could you give me some information about things to do in London?



knowledge	He has such a lot of knowledge about history.
luck	I need a bit of luck!
luggage	Please leave all your luggage at the hotel and we'll pick it up later.
money	How much money do you have in your purse?
news	The news is good! John has passed the exam!
pasta	I love pasta!
progress	We haven't made much progress on our project.
research	Julie is doing research in neuroscience.
snow	There's been a lot of snow this year.
spaghetti	Could we have spaghetti with meatballs?
spinach	She likes spinach with garlic.
traffic	Was there a lot of traffic in central London?
vocabulary	Vocabulary is very important in language learning.
work	Do you have any work to do this weekend?

Nouns Which Are Always Plural

In English, we have singular nouns (like *'book'*) that take a singular verb, and we have plural nouns (like *'books'*) that take a plural verb. We also have uncountable nouns (like *'rice'*) that always take a singular verb.

Remember:

- singular form of 'be' → *is / am* (present) or *was* (past)
- singular form of normal verbs in present simple → *verb + -s / -es* (e.g. *plays*)
- plural form of 'be' → *are* (present) or *were* (past)
- plural form of normal verbs in present simple → *verb (no -s / -es)* (e.g. *play*)

We also have a small group of nouns that are always plural.

- Plural nouns always take a plural verb:
- The jeans **are** red. (NOT: The jeans **is** red.)
- Your sunglasses **are** dirty. (NOT: Your sunglasses **is** dirty.)

Some plural nouns don't end in -s, but they are still plural and take a plural verb (e.g. *children, men, women, people*).

- The children **are** playing outside. (NOT: The children **is** playing outside.)
- People **are** very friendly here. (NOT: People **is** very friendly here.)
- The women in this team **are** very skilled. (NOT: The women in this team **is** very skilled.)

We use them with 'some' and 'any', not 'a/an':

- I need **some** scissors. (NOT: I need **a** scissors.)
- Do you have **any** clothes I could borrow? (NOT: Do you have **a** clothes I could borrow?)

We also use them with 'these' and 'those', not 'this' and 'that'.

- **These** are my glasses. (NOT: ~~This~~ are my glasses.)
- **Those** binoculars are really good quality. (NOT: ~~That~~ binoculars are really good quality.)

We can't use them with numbers, but we can often use 'number + pairs of'.

- I need **two pairs of trousers**. (NOT: I need ~~two trousers~~.)
- There were **a few pairs of pyjamas** in that pack. (NOT: There were ~~few pyjamas~~ in that pack.)

Words like this include:

Tools that have two parts or blades:

- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Tongs
- Pliers

Things you use to look through:

- Glasses
- Sunglasses
- Goggles
- Spectacles
- Binoculars

Things you wear on your legs:

- Trousers
- Jeans
- Tights
- Pants
- Pyjamas
- Shorts
- Leggings

Other words:

- Clothes
- Thanks (when it's a noun)
- Congratulations

Collective Nouns

We can use some nouns to talk about a group of people. These nouns are called collective nouns, and include words like *government*, *family*, *team*, *audience*, *company*, *public* and *staff*. These nouns are sometimes tricky because we use them as singular nouns, but they're actually talking about more than one person.

So, do we say, '*my family is coming*' or '*my family are coming*'?

In UK English, we can use either a singular verb '*The football team **is** winning*' or a plural verb '*The football team **are** winning*', but it's much more common to use a plural verb. US English generally uses a singular verb, and in British English, it's much more common to use a plural verb.

- UK: **Are** your staff happy?
- US: **Is** your staff happy?

- UK: My family **live** in Scotland.
- US: My family **lives** in Scotland.

- UK: The government **are** making big changes.
- US: The government **is** making big changes.

Possessive Forms of Nouns

We use the possessive form of nouns to say that someone has something or that something belongs to someone.

There are two ways to show possession in English:

1. 'apostrophe + s'

- **Tom's car** is very fast.

2. + 'of'

- **The roof of the house** is very old.

Noun + Noun

We can sometimes use one noun before another. The first noun describes the second one or shows what type it is. We don't put 'apostrophe + s' in these cases. The nouns work together as one unit.

- **city centre** (= the centre of a city)
- **train ticket** (= a ticket for a train)
- **phone charger** (= a charger for a phone)
- **coffee shop** (= a shop that sells coffee)



Compound Nouns

When we use two nouns together, they can make a compound noun. Sometimes there is a hyphen (e.g. *great-grandmother*), and sometimes the two nouns are written as one (e.g. *football*).

Here are some examples of hyphenated compound nouns:

- mother-in-law
- father-in-law
- X-ray
- T-shirt
- self-control
- self-esteem
- decision-making
- problem-solving

Here are some examples of two nouns written as one:

- toothpaste
- bedroom
- armchair
- newspaper
- notebook
- handbag
- classroom
- hairbrush
- shoelace
- railway
- teabag

Nouns and Their Verb Agreement

One of the most confusing things about the nouns we've studied is choosing the correct verb to go with them.

The table below shows how the different types of nouns we've mentioned either use singular or plural verbs:

Type of noun	Singular or plural verb?	
Singular countable noun	Singular verb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The book was on the table. • The boy is on his own.
Plural countable noun	Plural verb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These shoes are very comfortable. • The sandwiches were delicious.
Uncountable noun	Singular verb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information is useful. • Love makes the world go round.
Collective noun (UK)	Plural verb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team were winning. • Are the police coming?
Collective noun (US)	Singular verb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team was winning. • Is the police coming?
Nouns which are always plural (things)	Plural verb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scissors were on the desk. • Your sunglasses are lovely!
Nouns which are always plural (people)	Plural verb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The children are playing outside. • The men were shouting loudly.
Time expressions (as a single idea)	Singular verb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ten years was a long time. • Five minutes is enough. • Two weeks seems like forever.