

# Countables/uncountables

Many nouns can be used as countable or uncountable nouns, usually with a difference in meaning. Compare:

## *Countable*

- ☐ Did you hear a **noise** just now?  
(= a specific noise)
- ☐ I bought a **paper** to read.  
(= a newspaper)
- ☐ There's a **hair** in my soup!  
(= one single hair)
- ☐ You can stay with us. There is a spare **room**. (= a room in a house)
- ☐ I had some interesting **experiences** while I was travelling. (= things that happened to me)
- ☐ Enjoy your trip. Have a good **time**!

## *Uncountable*

- ☐ I can't work here. There's too much **noise**. (*not* too many noises)
- ☐ I need **some paper** to write on.  
(= material for writing on)
- ☐ You've got very long **hair**. (*not* hairs)  
(= all the hair on your head)
- ☐ You can't sit here. There isn't **room**.  
(= space)
- ☐ They offered me the job because I had a lot of **experience**. (*not* experiences)
- ☐ I can't wait. I haven't got **time**.

Coffee/tea/juice/beer etc. (drinks) are normally uncountable:

- ☐ I don't like **coffee** very much.

But you can say a **coffee** (= a cup of coffee), **two coffees** (= two cups) etc. :

- ☐ **Two coffees** and **an orange juice**, please.

The following nouns are usually uncountable:

accommodation	behaviour	damage	luck	permission	traffic
advice	bread	furniture	luggage	progress	weather
baggage	chaos	information	news	scenery	work

#### Countable

- ☐ I'm looking for a **job**.
- ☐ What a beautiful **view**!
- ☐ It's a nice **day** today.
- ☐ We had a lot of **bags** and **cases**.
- ☐ **These chairs** are mine.
- ☐ That's a good **suggestion**.

#### Uncountable

- ☐ I'm looking for **work**. (*not* a work)
- ☐ What beautiful **scenery**!
- ☐ It's nice **weather** today.
- ☐ We had a lot of **baggage/luggage**
- ☐ **This furniture** is mine.
- ☐ That's good **advice**.

- We can also say:  
*This is **a fine cheese**.* (= a fine variety or type)  
*These **cheeses** are produced only in Italy.* (= these types of cheese)
- We can say *one fish, two fish, one deer, two deer*. We can also say *all the fishes in the sea*. (= the different types of fish)

- The words *means*, *series* and *species* look like plural nouns but they are countable and have singular forms:  
*They found that the only **means** to cross the river was to swim.*  
*Which is your favourite **series** on TV?*  
*One **species** is destroyed in forest fires every day.*
- *Spaghetti* looks like a plural noun but it is uncountable:  
*The **spaghetti** is ready.*

70.1 Which of the underlined parts of these sentences is correct?

- 1 'Did you hear noise / a noise just now?' 'No, I didn't hear anything.' (a noise is correct).
- 2 a If you want to know the news, you can read paper / a paper.  
b I want to print some documents, but the printer is out of paper / papers.
- 3 a I thought there was somebody in the house because there was light / a light on inside.  
b Light / A light comes from the sun.
- 4 a I was in a hurry this morning. I didn't have time / a time for breakfast.  
b 'Did you enjoy your holiday?' 'Yes, we had wonderful time / a wonderful time.'
- 5 This is nice room / a nice room. Did you decorate it yourself?
- 6 Sue was very helpful. She gave us some very useful advice / advices.
- 7 Did you have nice weather / a nice weather when you were away?
- 8 We were very unfortunate. We had bad luck / a bad luck.
- 9 Is it difficult to find a work / job at the moment?
- 10 Our travel / journey from Paris to Moscow by train was very tiring.
- 11 When the fire alarm rang, there was total chaos / a total chaos.
- 12 I had to buy a / some bread because I wanted to make some sandwiches.
- 13 Bad news don't / doesn't make people happy.
- 14 Your hair is / Your hairs are too long. You should have it / them cut.
- 15 The damage / the damages caused by the storm will cost a lot to repair.



*She gave me **advice** but I didn't listen.*

*Could you help me to carry all this **baggage**?*

*The **countryside** here is beautiful.*

*Accidents cause a lot of damage - be careful! I don't feel comfortable with electronic **equipment**.*

*This **evidence** is not very reliable.*

*I like your **furniture** - where did you get it?*

*Your **hair** looks great - how do you get it to look like that?*

*She is in very good **health**.*

*The teacher gives a lot of **homework** and expects it in on time.*

*Where do you get your **information** from - is it reliable enough?*

*Do you have much **knowledge** of economic theory?*

*I don't need this **money** - take it back.*

*The news says the **weather** is going to get better.*

*I've got **permission** to go.*

*You've made **progress** - keep trying.*

*I had a lot of **work** to do in town and I've only just finished it. (Compare: I had lots of **jobs** and I've only just finished them.)*

are/were      these/those      they  
do

## Plural:

*trunks (короткие штаны)*

### 1. Clothing

trousers, jeans, shorts, tights, glasses *pyjamas underpants*  
*braces overalls (спецодежда) pants*

### 2. Tools and equipment:

scissors, scales, binoculars, pliers, goods, glasses,  
handcuffs(наручники), scissors, spectacles, stairs,  
headquarters, Dungarees (джинсовый полукомбинезон)

### 3. Always plural

cattle, police, earnings, premises, surroundings, savings,  
valuables, thanks, congratulations, odds, oats (овёс), clothes

<i>belongings</i>	<i>He packed his few <b>belongings</b> in a suitcase and left.</i>
<i>clothes</i>	<i>All my <b>clothes</b> are in that wardrobe.</i>
<i>congratulations</i>	<i><b>Congratulations</b> on your wedding.</i>
<i>contents</i>	<i>He emptied the <b>contents</b> of his pocket.</i>
<i>earnings</i>	<i>Average <b>earnings</b> for office workers are rising.</i>
<i>outskirts</i>	<i>The <b>outskirts</b> of the city are a very nice place to live.</i>
<i>premises</i>	<i>The police escorted him off the <b>premises</b>.</i>
<i>remains</i>	<i>They've just discovered the <b>remains</b> of an ancient castle.</i>
<i>surroundings</i>	<i>Working in pleasant <b>surroundings</b> is important.</i>

*This pair of jeans is new.  
These jeans are new.*

# Singular:

## 1. End in –s:

- diseases
- games
- subjects of study and activities (-ics)

Mumps (свинка), measles (корь), diabetes  
cards, draughts [dra:fts], billiards, dominoes  
phys<sup>ics</sup>, mathemat<sup>ics</sup>, statist<sup>ics</sup>, politic<sup>ics</sup>, gymnast<sup>ics</sup>

Singular/Plural	Plural
<i>The house was in a terrible <b>condition</b>.</i>	<i>The <b>conditions</b> in the prison were terrible.</i>
<i>He's a member of the Environmental Research <b>Foundation</b>.</i>	<i>The <b>foundations</b> of the building were laid ten years ago.</i>
<i>Time is our most valuable <b>resource</b>.</i>	<i>We do not have the <b>resources</b> to deal with the problem.</i>
<i>She faints at the <b>sight</b> of blood.</i>	<i>Let's go and see the <b>sights</b>.</i>
<i>'URL' is the technical <b>term</b> for what is often called a 'web address'.</i>	<i>Have you read the <b>terms</b> of the agreement?</i>
<i>Air <b>travel</b> is becoming cheaper.</i>	<i>His <b>travels</b> provided good material for a book.</i>

## UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS

Uncountable nouns are singular, have no plural form, and are followed by a singular verb. They include:

- groups made up of similar items
- substances: liquids, solids, gases and materials
- languages and fields of study
- sports, hobbies and recreation
- general activities (usually gerunds)
- natural phenomena
- abstract nouns

furniture, clothing, equipment, fruit, money, luggage, rubbish / garbage, traffic, make-up

water, blood, soup; butter, gold, earth; air, steam, oxygen; wool, cotton, plastic

English, French, Greek, chemistry, history, architecture

tennis, football, golf, bridge, basketball

sleeping, driving, playing, walking, reading

weather, rain, snow, fog, hail, thunder, lightning, darkness, sunshine, gravity, electricity, humidity

life, nature, education, happiness, violence, news, work, advice, anger, hunger, proof, evidence, luck

## QUANTIFIERS

The following table shows which quantifiers are typically used with which kind of nouns.

singular nouns	plural nouns	uncountable nouns	both countable and uncountable nouns
<i>each, every, another, either, neither, the whole, the entire</i>	<i>many, (a) few, both, several, most, more, a couple of, all, each of, either of, neither of</i>	<i>much, more, (a) little, a bit of, a great deal of, too much / little</i>	<i>some, any, no, a lot of, lots of, most, half, plenty of, enough</i>