

# Nouns

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Singular & Plural Nouns:  
Definitions, Rules & Examples

# What is a Noun?

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- **noun** (noun): a word (except a pronoun) that identifies a person, place or thing, or names one of them (proper noun)
- The simple definition is: **a person, place or thing**. Here are some examples:

**person:** man, woman, teacher, John, Mary

**place:** home, office, town, countryside, America

**thing:** table, car, banana, money, music, love, dog, monkey

Another (more complicated) way of recognizing  
a noun is by its:

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- ending
- position
- function

# Noun ending

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There are certain word endings that show that a word is a noun, for example:

- -ity → **nationality**
- -ment → **appointment**
- -ness → **happiness**
- -ation → **relation**
- -hood → **childhood**

**But** this is **not true** for the word endings of all nouns. For example, the noun "spoon**ful**" ends in -ful, but the adjective "care**ful**" also ends in -ful.

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# Position in sentence

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We can often recognise a noun by its position in the sentence.

Nouns often come after a **determiner** (a determiner is a word like **a, an, the, this, my, such**):

- a **relief**
- an **afternoon**
- the **doctor**
- this **word**
- my **house**
- such **stupidity**

Nouns often come after **one or more adjectives**:

- a great **relief**
- a peaceful **afternoon**
- the tall, Indian **doctor**
- this difficult **word**
- my brown and white **house**
- such crass **stupidity**



# Gender-specific Noun

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- A gender-specific noun is a noun that refers specifically to someone or something **male** or a **female**. In English, the gender of most nouns is neuter.
- However, if a noun refers to something obviously male or female, then its gender will be masculine or feminine (as determined by the meaning).



# Genders of Noun

- Masculine Gender
- Feminine Gender
- Neuter Gender
- Common Gender



**Gender Specific  
(Masculine)**



**rooster**



**man**



**bull elephant**

**Gender Specific  
(Feminine)**



**hen**



**woman**



**tigress**

**Not Gender Specific  
(Neutral)**



**chicken**



**doctor**



**hippopotamus**

# MASCULINE GENDER

- Masculine Gender is a name that denotes a male person or animal.

**Example:** grandfather, father, uncle, brother, nephew, son, man...



# Nouns referring to males:

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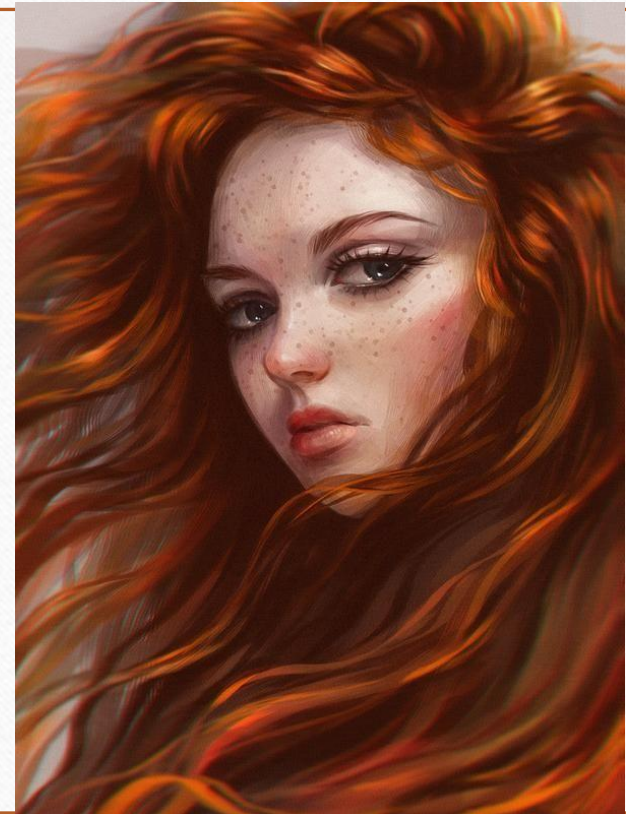
- king, uncle, drake (male duck), wether (a castrated male sheep or goat)

*The grammatical gender of these nouns is masculine.*

# FEMININE GENDER

- Feminine Gender is a name that expresses a female person or animal.

**Example:** grandmother, mother, aunt, sister, niece, daughter, woman...



# Nouns referring to females:

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- queen, vixen (female fox), bitch (female dog), sow (female pig)

*The grammatical gender of these nouns is feminine.*



# NEUTER GENDER

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- Neuter Gender is a name that shows a thing which is neither male nor female, especially with thing without life.

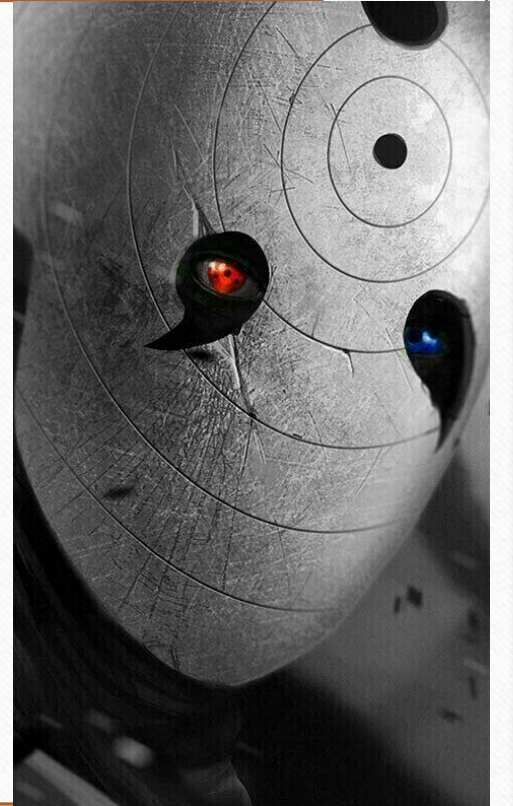
**Example:** table, book, car, train, pen, house, school, chair...



# COMMON GENDER

- Common Gender is used to stand in stead of male or female nouns.

**Example:** grandparents, parents, guardian, child, student, friend, cousin, enemy...





# The following are not gender-specific nouns:

- soldier, shark, lawyer, person

*Without further context, these are gender-neutral nouns.*



# Here are **Two** Gender-specific Nouns. Can you find them?

- mob
- headmistress
- congregation
- army
- hive
- bunch
- range
- school
- uncle



# Real-Life Examples of Gender-specific Nouns

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In English, the gender of a noun determines the pronouns we use with it (e.g., *he, she, it*) and the possessive determiners (e.g., *his, her, its*). In each of the following examples, the gender-specific noun is shaded and the related pronoun or possessive determiner is in bold:

- *My mother had a great deal of trouble with me, but I think **she** enjoyed it. (Writer Mark Twain)*
- *She got her looks from her father. **He's** a plastic surgeon. (Comedian Groucho Marx)*
- *Behind every great man is a woman rolling **her** eyes. (Actor Jim Carrey)*
- *I haven't spoken to my wife in years. I didn't want to interrupt **her**. (Comedian Rodney Dangerfield)*

# Why Should I Care about Gender-specific Nouns?

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# Using the word "actress"

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- Using the gender-specific noun "actress" is considered sexist by some, most probably because the noun "actor" has always been a gender-neutral term meaning a person who acts.
  - Some feel the word "actress," which emerged long after "actor," is not needed and only serves to engender gender inequality. (After all, there are no female versions of nouns like "doctor," "politician," "pilot," and "beggar," so it's a fair point.)
  - As a result of increasing public awareness on gender equality, the gender-neutral usage of "actor" is becoming more popular in modern English as people strive not to offend.

# Using the word "chairman"

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- Not everyone treats the noun "chairman" as a gender-specific noun, and it is regularly used for men and women. However, quite understandably, many consider it as masculine noun, and when the appointed person is female, they opt for "chairwoman" (a term that has been in use since at least the 17th century). So, some will think "chairman" is just for men, and some won't. This issue is often avoided by using the gender-neutral term "chairperson" or "chair."

# Using the word "chairman"

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- *Don't call me "chairman" because I'm a woman. Don't call me "chairwoman" because my sex is irrelevant. Don't call me "chairperson" because that term is trying too hard not to be sexist. Call me "chair."*

(This captures the issue. If you're unsure, use "chair.")

# Choosing the right version of *blonde/blond*.

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# The word **blond/blonde** changes depending on its gender.

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- Blond is a noun meaning a fair-haired male.
- The blond has nice shoes.

(We now know it's a boy.)

- Blond is also an adjective used to describe anybody (regardless of their gender) with fair hair.
- The blond girl and the blond boy make a nice blond couple.

(When it's an adjective, blond can be used for all genders.)

- Blonde is a noun meaning a fair-haired female.

- The blonde has nice shoes.

(We now know it's a girl.)

- Blonde is also an adjective used to describe a female (or females) with fair hair.
- The blonde girl and the blond boy make a nice blond couple.

(As an adjective, blonde or blond can be used to describe females.)

# Finding an alternative to *his/her*.

Look at these sentences:

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- Each person must understand where **he** fits in the team.
- Anyone who forgets **his** passport will be sent home.

**But** what if they're not all male? Using *he* or *his* for unknown people is, of course, sexist and inaccurate.

To get around this, you could write:

- Each person must understand where **he/she** fits in the team.
- Anyone who forgets **his** or **her** passport will be sent home.

But, as they're **clumsy** solutions, lots of people naturally opt for this:

- Each person must understand where **they** fit in the team.
- Anyone who forgets **their** passport will be sent home.

**NB:** "Singular they" was nominated as the American Dialect Society's word of the year in 2015

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**Using gender-neutral pronouns for  
people who do not identify  
themselves as either male or female.**

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Be aware that some people identify themselves as **both male and female** while others as **neither male nor female**.

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- These people might ask you to use *they* (*their, them, theirs, themselves*) or just their name instead of a pronoun (e.g., *Sarah, Sarah's, Sarah's self*) when talking about them.



# "They" is plural, but the person's name isn't.

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- He **They** **is** **are** taking **his** **their** exams tomorrow. ✓

(This sounds natural because we have plurals throughout, i.e., "they," "are," and "their.")

- Jo is taking **his** **their** exams tomorrow. ✓

(This sounds less natural. We now have two singulars ("Jo" and "is") with a plural ("their"). This example is correct though.)

# Use "themselves" instead of "themself."

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When referring to one non-binary person, use "themselves" not "themself." For example:

- She ~~They~~ is ~~are~~ managing ~~herself~~ ~~themself~~. ✓

(The word "themselves" is still not listed in many dictionaries. If you try to write "themself," your autocorrect will change it to "themselves." However, when using a **reflexive pronoun** for one non-binary person, you should use "themselves.")

# Person of Nouns

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- **Person** is that property of a noun or a pronoun which **distinguishes the speaker, the person spoken to, and the person or object spoken of.**



# NOUN PERSON



## Three Persons

### First Person (Speaking)

*I am reciting Homer today.*

### Second Person (Spoken to)

*You, Josh, should listen  
closely.*

### Third Person (Spoken of)

*The Odyssey is an epic poem  
like no other.*

# Function in a sentence

*Nouns have certain functions (jobs) in a sentence, for example:*

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- **Subject:** The mailcarrier always rings twice. Tulips are early spring flowers. (Tells who or what does or is something.)
- **Direct object:** I finally sold my car. (Tells what is sold.)
- **Indirect object:** Harold gave the cat another olive. (Tells to whom he gave the olive.)
- **Object of preposition:** She gave directions over the phone. (Tells what is the object of the preposition over.)
- **Adverb:** The train leaves today. (Tells when.)
- **Adjective:** The office building faces the zoo. (Tells what kind, which one.)
- **Possession:** The movie's plot fooled no one. (Shows ownership or possession.)

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# What is a Noun? Quiz

1. The simple definition of a noun is: a person, place or

...

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a) pronoun

b) thing

2. To decide if a word's a noun, look at its ending,  
position and ...

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- a) function
- b) first letter

3. A word is almost certainly a noun if it ends with ...

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a) -ness

b) -est

## 4. Which is a noun?

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- a) govern
- b) government

**5. In which sentence does a noun follow a determiner?**

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- a) The food's delicious.
- b) It's delicious food.



**6. In which sentence does a noun follow an adjective?**

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- a) Their team played well.
- b) It's a good, strong team.

## 7. Nouns often come after one or more ...

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- a) adjectives
- b) adverbs

## 8. Nouns often function as the subject and/or object of ...

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- a) an adjective
- b) a verb

9. "She plays the guitar." The noun "guitar" is the

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- a) subject of the verb
- b) object of the verb

**10. In which sentence is the subject a pronoun?**

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- a) England is cold now.
- b) You'll need warm clothes.

# Plural Noun Rules

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There are many plural noun rules, and because we use nouns so frequently when writing, it's important to know all of them! The correct **spelling** of plurals usually depends on what letter the singular **noun ends in**.

1. To make regular nouns plural, add **-s** to the end.

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- cat – cat**s**
- house – hous**es**

2. If the singular noun ends in **-s, -ss, -sh, -ch, -x, or -z**, add **-es** to the end.

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- truss – trusses
- bus – buses
- marsh – marshes
- lunch – lunches
- tax – taxes
- blitz – blitzes



3. In some cases, singular nouns ending in -s or -z, require that you **double the -s or -z** prior to adding the **-es** for pluralization.

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- fez – fezz**es**
- gas – gass**es**



If the noun ends with **-f** or **-fe**, the f is often changed to **-ve** before adding the **-s** to form the plural version.

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- wife – wives
- wolf – wolves

**Exceptions:**

- roof – roofs
- belief – beliefs
- chef – chefs
- chief – chiefs

5. If a singular noun ends in **-y** and the letter before the -y is a **consonant**, change the ending to **-ies** to make the noun plural.

- city – **cities**
- puppy – **puppies**



6. If the singular noun ends in **-y** and the letter before the **-y** is a **vowel**, simply **add an -s** to make it plural.

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- ray – rays
- boy – boys

## 7. If the singular noun ends in **-o**, add **-es** to make it plural.

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- potato – potato**es**
- tomato – tomato**es**

### **Exceptions:**

- photo – photo**s**
- piano – piano**s**
- halo – halo**s**

With the unique word volcano, you can apply the standard pluralization for words that end in -o or not. It's your choice! Both of the following are correct:

- volcano**es**
- volcano**s**

8. If the singular noun ends in **-us**, the plural ending is frequently **-i**.

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- cact**us** – cacti
- foc**us** – foci

9. If the singular noun ends in **-is**, the plural ending is **-es**.

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- analysis – analys**es**
- ellipsis – ellips**es**

10. If the singular noun ends in **-on**, the plural ending is **-a**.

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- phenomenon – phenomena
- criterion – criteria



# 11. Some nouns **don't change** at all when they're pluralized.

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- sheep— sheep
- series – series
- species – species
- deer –deer

You need to see these nouns **in context** to identify them as singular or plural. Consider the following sentence:

- Mark caught one **fish**, but I caught three **fish**.

# Irregular Nouns

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- child – children
- goose – geese
- man – men
- woman – women
- tooth – teeth
- foot – feet
- mouse – mice
- person – people

# Types of Nouns

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**Common Nouns and Proper Nouns**

**Concrete Nouns and Abstract Nouns**

**Countable Nouns and Uncountable Nouns**

**Collective Nouns**

**Compound Nouns**

# Common Nouns

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- Most nouns are common nouns. Common nouns refer to people, places and things in general like *chair* or *dog*. Any noun that is not a name is a common noun.
- Examples: *teacher, car, music, danger, receipt*

Have you seen my **dog**?

The **books** are on your **desk**.

...the **pursuit** of **happiness**.

# Proper Nouns

- Names of people, places or organizations are proper nouns. Your name is a proper noun. *London* is a proper noun. *United Nations* is a proper noun.
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Rule: Proper nouns always start with a capital letter.

Examples: *Jane, Thailand, Sunday, James Bond, Einstein, Superman, Game of Thrones, Shakespeare*

Let me introduce you to **Mary**.

The capital of **Italy** is **Rome**.

He is the chairman of the **British Broadcasting Corporation**.

I was born in **November**.

**Note:** Adjectives that we make from proper nouns also usually start with a capital letter, for example *Shakespearian, Orwellian*.

## Capital Letters with Proper Nouns

**RULE:** We always use a Capital Letter for the first letter of a name or proper noun. This includes names of people, places, companies, days of the week and months.

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For example:

They like Anthony. (not They like anthony.)

I live in England.

She works for Sony.

The last day in January is a Monday.

We saw Titanic in the Odeon Cinema.

common noun	proper noun
man, boy	John
woman, girl	Mary
country, town	England, London
company	Ford, Sony
shop, restaurant	Amazon, Subway
month, day of the week	January, Sunday
book, film	<i>War and Peace, Titanic</i>

# Proper Nouns without THE

- with names of people;
- names of companies;

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- for shops, banks, hotels etc named after a founder or other person (with -'s or -s);
- with names of places;
- with "President/Doctor/Mr etc + Name;
- with "Lake/Mount + Name;
- for roads, streets, squares, parks etc;
- Many big, important buildings have names made of two words (for example, Kennedy place, we do not normally use "the").

<b>people</b>	Kennedy Airport, Alexander Palace, St Paul's Cathedral
<b>places</b>	Heathrow Airport, Waterloo Station, Edinburgh Castle

# Proper Nouns without THE

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We do not normally use "the" with **names of companies**. For example:

- Renault, Ford, Sony, EnglishClub (*not the EnglishClub*)
- General Motors, Air France, British Airways
- Warner Brothers, Brown & Son Ltd

**BUT** If the full (registered) name of a company starts with "The", then we use "The" if we use the full name, for example:

- The Post Publishing Public Co., Ltd

In this case, "The" is part of the company's name and must be capitalised, like all names.



<b>first names</b>	Bill ( <i>not the Bill</i> )
	Hilary
<b>surnames</b>	Clinton
	Gates
<b>full names</b>	Hilary Gates

<b>shops</b>	Harrods, Marks & Spencer, Macy's
<b>banks</b>	Barclays Bank
<b>hotels, restaurants</b>	Steve's Hotel, Joe's Cafe, McDonald's
<b>churches, cathedrals</b>	St John's Church, St Peter's Cathedral

<b>towns</b>	Washington ( <i>not</i> <del>The Washington</del> ), Paris, Tokyo
<b>states, regions</b>	Texas, Kent, Eastern Europe
<b>countries</b>	England, Italy, Brazil
<b>continents</b>	Asia, Europe, North America
<b>islands</b>	Corsica
<b>mountains</b>	Everest

**Exception!** If a country name includes "States", "Kingdom", "Republic" etc, we use "the":

<b>states</b>	the United States, the US, the United States of America, the USA
<b>kingdom</b>	the United Kingdom, the UK
<b>republic</b>	the French Republic

the president, the king	President Bush ( <i>not the President Bush</i> )
the captain, the detective	Captain Kirk, Detective Colombo
the doctor, the professor	Doctor Well, Dr Well, Professor Dolittle
my uncle, your aunt	Uncle Jack, Aunt Jill
	Mr Gates ( <i>not the Mr Gates</i> ), Mrs Clinton, Miss Black

Look at these example sentences:

- I wanted to speak to **the doctor**.
- I wanted to speak to **Doctor Brown**.
- Who was **the president** before **President Kennedy**?

We do not use "the" with "Lake/Mount + Name":

the lake	Lake Victoria
the mount	Mount Everest

Look at this example sentence:

- We live beside **Lake Victoria**. We have a fantastic view across **the lake**.

We do not normally use "the" for roads, streets, squares, parks etc:

<b>streets etc</b>	Oxford Street, Trenholme Road, Fifth Avenue
<b>squares etc</b>	Trafalgar Square, Oundle Place, Piccadilly Circus
<b>parks etc</b>	Central Park, Kew Gardens

# Proper Nouns with THE

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- for country names that include "States", "Kingdom", "Republic" etc (the United States of America/the USA, the United Kingdom/the UK, the French Republic);
- for names of canals, rivers, seas and oceans (the Suez Canal, the River Nile, the Nile, the Mediterranean Sea, the Mediterranean, the Pacific Ocean, the Pacific);
- for **plural** names of people and places (the Clintons, the Philippines, the United States, the Virgin Islands, the British Isles, the Himalayas, the Alps);
- for names made with "of " (the Tower of London, the Gulf of Siam, the London School of Economics, the Statue of Liberty);
- with the following **sorts of names:**



<b>hotels, restaurants</b>	the Ritz Hotel, the Peking Restaurant
<b>banks</b>	the National Westminster Bank
<b>cinemas, theatres</b>	the Royal Theatre, the ABC Cinema
<b>museums</b>	the British Museum, the National Gallery
<b>buildings</b>	the White House, the Crystal Palace
<b>newspapers</b>	the Daily Telegraph, the Sunday Post
<b>organisations</b>	the United Nations, the BBC, the European Union

# Concrete Nouns

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Concrete nouns are physical things that you can touch.

Examples: *man, rice, head, car, furniture, mobile phone*

- How many **stars** are there in the **universe**?
- Have you met **James Bond**?
- Pour the **water** down the **drain**.





# Abstract Nouns

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Abstract nouns are the opposite of concrete nouns. They are things that you cannot touch. Abstract nouns are ideas, concepts and feelings.

Examples: *happiness, courage, danger, truth*

- He has great **strength**.
- Who killed President Kennedy is a real **mystery**.
- Sometimes it takes **courage** to tell the **truth**.
- Their lives were full of **sadness**.





10 Steps  
to  
Happiness

@sylvia duckworth

# Countable Nouns

(also called **count nouns**)

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You can count countable nouns. Countable nouns have **singular** and **plural** forms.

Examples: *ball, boy, cat, person*

- I have only five **dollars**.
- The Earth was formed 4.6 billion **years** ago.
- There are lots of **people** but we don't have a **car**.



When a countable noun is **singular**, we must use a word like **a/the/my/this** with it:

- I want **an** orange. (*not ~~I want orange.~~*)
  - Where is **my** bottle? (*not ~~Where is bottle?~~*)
- 

When a countable noun is **plural**, we can use it alone:

- I like oranges.
- Bottles can break.

We can use **some** and **any** with countable nouns:

- I've got **some** dollars.
- Have you got **any** pens?

We can use **a few** and **many** with countable nouns:

- I've got **a few** dollars.
- I haven't got **many** pens.

# Uncountable Nouns

(also called **mass nouns**)

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You cannot count uncountable nouns. You need to use "measure words" to quantify them.

**Rule:** We **never** use uncountable nouns with the indefinite article (*a/an*). Uncountable nouns are always **singular**.

Examples: *water, happiness, cheese*

- Have you got some **money**?
- Air-conditioners use a lot of **electricity**.
- Do you have any **work** for me to do?
- Many Asians eat **rice**.



# Collective Nouns

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A collective noun denotes a group of individuals.

Examples: *class* (group of students), *pride* (group of lions), *crew* (group of sailors)

**Rule:** Collective nouns can be treated as **singular or plural**.

- His **family** live in different countries.
- An average **family** consists of four people.
- The new **company** is the result of a merger.
- The **board of directors** will meet tomorrow.



# Compound Nouns

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A compound noun is a noun that is made with two or more words.

Most compound nouns are [noun + noun] or [adjective + noun]. Each compound noun acts as a single unit and can be modified by adjectives and other nouns.

Compound nouns have three different forms:

- open or spaced - space between words (**bus stop**)
- hyphenated - hyphen between words (**mother-in-law**)
- closed or solid - no space or hyphen between words (**football**)

# Compound Nouns

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- Examples: *cat food, blackboard, breakfast, full moon, washing machine*
- Can we use the **swimming pool**?
- They stop work at **sunset**.
- Don't forget that **check-out** is at 12 noon.





# Gerund

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- A gerund is a noun formed from a verb. All gerunds end *-ing*.

For example: *swimming, running, drinking*

- Unlike a normal noun, a gerund maintains some verb-like properties. Like a verb, a gerund can take a direct object and be modified with an adverb.

## Gerunds

### Definition

Gerund: a noun ending “ing” that has been formed from a verb

thinking

playing

painting

eating

### Properties

Unlike a normal noun, a gerund can be modified by an adverb and take an object

carefully painting the fence

adverb

gerund

direct object

## Using Gerunds

1

As the Subject of a Verb

gerund

verb

**Running** is a good way to explore.

2

As the Object of a Verb

gerund

verb

He likes **running**.

3

As the Object of a Preposition

preposition

gerund

I am thinking of **running**.

4

As a Subject Complement

gerund

My new hobby is **running**.

renames the subject

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# Types of nouns

## Quiz

There are many different types of nouns:  
proper, common, concrete, abstract,  
countable, non-countable, collective,  
verbal and compound.

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See if you can **identify the types of nouns** shown **in square brackets** in the sentences below.

1. The [Rideau Canal] is a UNESCO  
World Heritage Site.

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- a) common noun
- b) proper noun
- c) abstract noun

2. The Canal connects two [cities]:  
Ottawa and Kingston.

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- a) common noun
- b) non-countable noun
- c) compound noun

3. The Rideau Canal was built for military and commercial [purposes].

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- a) concrete noun
- b) non-countable noun
- c) abstract noun



4. To commemorate the workers who died during the [building] of the Canal, the Rideau Canal Celtic Cross memorial was erected along the canal route in Ottawa.

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- a) collective noun
- b) verbal noun
- c) compound noun

5. The monument is also dedicated to the [families] of the workers.

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- a) collective noun
- b) non-countable noun
- c) abstract noun

6. During winter, approximately eight kilometres of the Canal becomes a [skateway].

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- a) proper noun
- b) abstract noun
- c) compound noun

7. [Malaria] was endemic in Ontario during the construction of the canal.

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- a) non-countable noun
- b) countable noun

8. The Rideau Waterway was designated  
a Canadian Heritage River in the [year]  
2000.

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- a) countable noun
- b) non-countable noun
- c) concrete noun

9. The [locks] of the Rideau Canal are still operated the way they were in 1832, when the Canal was first built.

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- a) concrete noun
- b) abstract noun
- c) collective noun

# Possessive

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When we want to show that something belongs to somebody or something, we usually add an **apostrophe + s ('s)** to a **singular** noun and an **apostrophe (')** to a plural noun.

Notice that the number of balls does not matter. The structure is influenced by the **possessor** and not the possessed.

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	one ball	more than one ball
one boy	 the boy's ball	 the boy's balls
more than one boy	 the boys' ball	 the boys' balls



The structure can be used **for a whole phrase**:

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- **the man next door's** mother (the mother of *the man next door*)
- **the Queen of England's** poodles (the poodles of *the Queen of England*)

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Although we can use **of** to show possession, it is more usual to use possessive 's. The following phrases have the same meaning, but #2 is more usual and natural:

- the boyfriend of my sister
- my sister's boyfriend

We very often use possessive 's with **names**:

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- This is Mary's car.
- Where is Ram's telephone?
- Who took Anthony's pen?
- I like Tara's hair.

When a name ends in **s**, we usually treat it like any other singular noun, and add 's:

- This is Charles's chair.

But it is **possible** (especially with older, classical names) to just add the apostrophe ':

- Who was Jesus' father?

# Irregular Plurals

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- Some nouns have irregular plural forms without **s** (man → men). To show possession, we usually add **'s** to the plural form of these nouns:

singular noun	plural noun
my child's dog	my children's dog
the man's work	the men's work
the mouse's cage	the mice's cage
a person's clothes	people's clothes

# Mini Quiz

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1. Which is correct?

"Are you going to \_\_\_\_\_ birthday party?"

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- a) Harry's
- b) Harrys'
- c) Harrys

2. "To prevent cheating in exams, all the \_\_\_\_\_ phones are collected beforehand."

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- a) student's
- b) students'
- c) students's

3. "My father's living in an \_\_\_\_\_ home."

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- a) old peoples'
- b) old people's
- c) old peoples



4. "Whose cat is this? Is it your \_\_\_\_\_?"

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- a) next door neighbours
- b) next door's neighbour
- c) next door neighbour's

**GOOD  
JOB**

**WELL  
DONE**

**THUMBS  
UP**

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**YOU  
ROCK**