

Count and Noncount Nouns

Grammar

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER



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What are Count Nouns and Noncount Nouns?

Noun: a word for an object, place, or person.

Examples include *dogs*, *fruit*, *Kentucky*, and *solar eclipse*.

Two distinct categories:

- (1) count nouns
- (2) noncount nouns.

COUNT NOUNS

- **Count nouns** are nouns that have a plural form, often ending in “s”.
- As their name suggests, these nouns can be counted with numbers.
- Most nouns are count nouns.
- While most counts nouns can become plural by adding an “s”, some have irregular forms.
- The following table details some irregular count nouns but is far from comprehensive.



Irregular Count Nouns (Irregular Plural Nouns, 2023)

Singular	Plural
Ends in -f → <i>knife</i> <i>life</i> <i>calf</i> <i>leaf</i>	Ends in -ves <i>knives</i> <i>lives</i> <i>calves</i> <i>leaves</i>
Ends in -o → <i>potato</i> <i>tomato</i> <i>hero</i>	Ends in -oes <i>potatoes</i> <i>tomatoes</i> <i>heroes</i>
Vowel Changes → <i>foot</i> <i>tooth</i> <i>goose</i> <i>man</i> <i>woman</i>	Vowel Changes <i>feet</i> <i>teeth</i> <i>geese</i> <i>men</i> <i>women</i>
Multiple Changes → <i>mouse</i> <i>ox</i> <i>child</i> <i>person</i>	Multiple Changes <i>mice</i> <i>oxen</i> <i>children</i> <i>people</i>
No Change → <i>sheep</i> <i>fish</i> <i>moose</i> <i>shrimp</i> <i>deer</i> <i>trout</i>	No Change <i>sheep</i> <i>fish</i> <i>moose</i> <i>shrimp</i> <i>deer</i> <i>trout</i>

NONCOUNT NOUNS

- **Noncount nouns** are nouns that do not have a distinct plural form and cannot be counted with numbers alone.
- Below are eight common categories of noncount nouns, which may help you remember them.

Common Categories of Noncount Nouns (Grammar: Count and Noncount Nouns, n.d.)

Groups of Similar Items	Natural Substances	Food	Abstract Concepts	Games	Subjects of Study	Languages	Activities (“-ing”form)
<i>work</i>	<i>air</i>	<i>milk</i>	<i>advice</i>	<i>soccer</i>	<i>economics</i>	<i>Arabic</i>	<i>swimming</i>
<i>equipment</i>	<i>ice</i>	<i>rice</i>	<i>happiness</i>	<i>tennis</i>	<i>physics</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>dancing</i>
<i>homework</i>	<i>water</i>	<i>coffee</i>	<i>health</i>	<i>basketball</i>	<i>astronomy</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>reading</i>
<i>money</i>	<i>fire</i>	<i>bread</i>	<i>education</i>	<i>hockey</i>	<i>biology</i>	<i>Hindi</i>	<i>smoking</i>
<i>transportation</i>	<i>wood</i>	<i>sugar</i>	<i>research</i>	<i>football</i>	<i>history</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>drinking</i>
<i>clothing</i>	<i>blood</i>	<i>meat</i>	<i>knowledge</i>	<i>chess</i>	<i>statistics</i>	<i>Korean</i>	<i>studying</i>
<i>luggage</i>	<i>hair</i>	<i>water</i>	<i>information</i>	<i>checkers</i>		<i>Spanish</i>	
<i>jewelry</i>	<i>gold</i>						
<i>traffic</i>	<i>silver</i>						

Using Articles Before Count and Noncount Nouns

Count nouns can take the definite article “*the*” when the noun is specific, and the indefinite articles “*a*” or “*an*” when the noun is nonspecific.

E.g., “*A cat is a type of animal. The cats on my bed are black and white.*”

Noncount nouns can take the definite article “*the*” when the noun is specific but can **never** take an indefinite article like “*a*” or “*an*”. When a noncount is nonspecific, it does not take any article.

E.g., “*Milk is delicious, but the milk in my fridge has gone bad.*”

Using Quantifier Adjectives and Units to Measure Nouns

- Quantifiers describe the amount there is of a given noun.
- Certain quantifiers only modify count nouns, while others only modify noncount nouns.
- There are a few quantifiers that can modify both count and noncount nouns.

QUANTIFYING NOUNS

Count nouns can take the following quantifiers:

- *Few*
- *Many*
- *A lot of*
- **Some**
- **Any**
- **Enough**
- **Plenty of**
- **No**

Noncount nouns can take the following quantifiers:

- *Little*
- *Much*
- *Lots of / A little bit of*
- **Some**
- **Any**
- **Enough**
- **Plenty of**
- **No**

Notice that many quantifiers can be used for count nouns and noncount nouns. Here are some examples of each of them.

Examples: Quantifying Count Nouns

- *The student had three apples. The teacher had sixteen apples. The student had **few** apples, and the teacher had **many**.*
- *There are three thousand international students at MUN. There are **a lot of** international students at MUN.*
- *There are **plenty of** resources for students at the Writing Centre.*

Examples: Quantifying Noncount Nouns

- *I have a **little bit of work** to do before the weekend.*
- *There is **too much rain** in St. John's.*
- *I will get **some studying** done during the midterm break.*

Exceptions to the Rule

- Some nouns can be both count nouns and noncount nouns.
- These are exceptions to the rules, so you will just need to memorize them.
- We recommend you make a note every time you come across one.

COFFEE**Count:** *He ordered a coffee.***Noncount:** *Would you like some coffee?***TRUTH****Count:** *We hold these truths to be self-evident.***Noncount:** *There is no truth to the rumours.***CHOCOLATE****Count:** *I had two chocolates at dinner.***Noncount:** *He wants chocolate on his sundae.***TIME****Count:** *He submitted his assignment three times.***Noncount:** *I don't think I have time to do my hair before I leave.*

(Davis, n.d.; *Countable and Uncountable Nouns*, 2022)

Conclusion

- There are many small rules to keep in mind when working with nouns.
- Some of them can be counted, while others cannot.
- It is important to remember that while this document provides a general guide, there are many exceptions to the rules.
- The best way to learn all of these rules and exceptions is to do lots of reading in English and take notes whenever you notice a noun that does not seem to follow the general rules laid out here.
- We recommend that you keep a small notebook handy for all of your English-learning observations.

Works Cited

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