

Nouns

Nouns are one of the four major word classes, along with verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Nouns are the largest word class.

Types of nouns

A noun refers to a person, animal or thing. Some examples are:

Nouns referring to people

<i>boy</i>	<i>woman</i>	<i>student</i>	<i>Maria</i>
<i>girl</i>	<i>teacher</i>	<i>president</i>	<i>Lennon</i>

Nouns referring to **animals and things**

<i>Book</i>	<i>tree</i>	<i>Manchester</i>	<i>name</i>
<i>computer</i>	<i>bird</i>	<i>idea</i>	<i>place</i>

The woman in the picture is my mother.

Her name is Anna. She's from Manchester.

- **Proper nouns** are the names of specific people, animals and things, and places.

I've read **The Old Man and the Sea**.

You can see the **Mona Lisa** in the **Louvre**.

- **Concrete nouns** refer to material objects which we can see or touch.

The **door** and **window** are open.

- **Abstract nouns** refer to things which are not material objects, such as ideas, qualities, and feelings.

Do you believe in life after **death**?

Enjoy the **freedom** of the outdoors.

He answered all my questions with her usual **honesty**.

He pushed against the rock with all his **strength**.

The growing anger and frustration of young unemployed people.

There were **fear** and **hatred** in his voice.

- Gerunds

The *-ing* forms of verbs (gerunds) can also act as nouns.

Smoking is forbidden on all flights.

*The City Council does its economic **planning** every September.*

Nouns: singular and plural

1. Nouns used only in the singular

Some nouns are used only in the singular, even though they end in *-s*. These include: the names of academic subjects such as *politics, statistics, linguistics, economics, mathematics/ maths, physics*; the physical activities *gymnastics, athletics aerobics*; the diseases *measles, diabetes, mumps*; games such as *cards, darts, billiards, dominoes*; and the word *news*.

Maths was never my best subject at school.

*She's got a degree in **politics**.*

***Aerobics** is great fun – you should try it!*

***Mumps** is a disease, especially of children that causes painful swellings in the neck.*

*Who wants to play **cards**?*

*That's great **news**.*

News of a serious road accident is just coming in.

2. Nouns used only in the plural

Some nouns only have a plural form. They cannot be used with numbers. They include the names of certain tools, instruments and articles of clothing which have two parts.

Tools and instruments

<i>binoculars</i>	<i>headphones</i>	<i>Sunglasses</i>
<i>glasses</i>	<i>scissors</i>	<i>Tweezers</i>

Clothing

<i>jeans</i>	<i>pyjamas</i>	<i>Tights</i>
<i>pants</i>	<i>shorts</i>	<i>Trousers</i>

*I've got new **sunglasses**. Do you like them?*

*He always wears **shorts**, even in the winter.*

*My **jeans** need washing.*

*These **tights** were quite cheap.*

*We looked at the birds through **binoculars**.*

*A pair of nail **scissors**.*

3. Other nouns which are always plural in form

<i>belongings</i>	<i>Outskirts</i>	<i>earnings</i>	<i>Troops (soldiers)</i>	<i>Surroundings (environment)</i>
<i>clothes</i>	<i>premises (buildings)</i>	<i>Stairs</i>	<i>Remains (what's left)</i>	<i>goods</i>
<i>congratulations</i>	<i>savings (money)</i>	<i>thanks</i>		

*Please ensure that you take all your **belongings** with you as you leave the aircraft.*

*They live on the **outskirts** of Frankfurt, almost in the countryside.*

*My **clothes** are wet. I'll have to go upstairs and change.*

*She spent all her **savings** on a trip to South America.*

*These **premises** are regularly checked by security guards.*

*They live on the **outskirts** of Milan.*

*They announced the withdrawal of 12000 **troops** from the area.*

*The **remains** of a Roman fort.*

*She fed the **remains** of her lunch to the dog.*

*The **goods** have been sent to you by post.*

*The **clothes** were hanging on the line.*

*To work in pleasant **surroundings**.*

Collective nouns (group words)

Some nouns refer to groups of people (e.g. *audience, committee, government, team*). These are sometimes called collective nouns. Some collective nouns can take a singular or plural verb, depending on whether they are considered as a single unit or as a collection of individuals:

<i>audience</i>	<i>crew</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>Crowd</i>
<i>committee</i>	<i>enemy</i>	<i>Team</i>	<i>Orchestra</i>
<i>company</i>	<i>government</i>	<i>Manchester Unite (a team)</i>	<i>Club</i>

The **crowd** are really enjoying the game.

The **crew** are very tired after a long sea voyage.

The **club** has/have voted to admit new members.

The **class** will miss their lessons because they are all going to a trip.

The **orchestra** consists of eighty-six musicians.

The **orchestra** don't know what to play.

Compare

seen as a single unit	seen as individuals
<i>The audience was larger than average and the concert was a success.</i>	<i>The audience were all cheering wildly.</i>
<i>The government is hoping that online voting will attract more young people to vote.</i>	<i>The government are all very nervous about the report, which will be published tomorrow.</i>
<i>Manchester United is the world's most famous football club.</i>	<i>Manchester United are looking forward to meeting Valencia in the final next week.</i>

In general, a plural verb is more common with these nouns in informal situations.

Nouns: countable and uncountable

Countable and uncountable nouns

1. Countable nouns

Some nouns refer to things which, in English, are treated as separate items which can be counted. These are called countable nouns. They can be singular or plural. Here are some examples:

a car, three cars

my cousin, my two cousins

2. Uncountable nouns

In English grammar, some things are seen as a whole or mass. These are called uncountable nouns, because they cannot be separated or counted. They are not used with the indefinite article (a/an), numbers or in the plural.

Some examples of uncountable nouns are:

Ideas, feelings, qualities and experiences: *advice, information, progress, news, luck, fun, work, happiness, generosity, safety, health, anger.*

Materials and substances: *water, rice, cement, gold, milk, cheese, sugar, oil, plastic, tea, coffee, meat.*

Weather words: *weather, thunder, lightning, rain, snow, ice*

Names for groups or collections of things: *furniture, equipment, rubbish, luggage*

Other common uncountable nouns include: *accommodation, baggage, homework, knowledge, money, permission, research, traffic, travel.*

*We're going to get new **furniture** for the living room.*

Not: ~~We're going to get a new furniture for the living room.~~ or ~~We're going to get new furnitures for the living room.~~

*We had terrible **weather** last week.*

Not: ~~We had a terrible weather last week.~~

*We need **rice** next time we go shopping.*

Some nouns always have plural form but they are uncountable because we cannot use numbers with them.

*I bought **two pairs of trousers**.*

Not: ~~I bought two trousers.~~

Other nouns of this type are: *shorts, pants, pyjamas, glasses (for the eyes), binoculars, scissors.*

Warning:

Some nouns which are uncountable in English are countable in other languages (e.g. *accommodation, advice, furniture, information*):

*They can give you some **information** about **accommodation** at the tourist office.*

Not: ~~They can give you some informations about accommodations at the tourist office.~~

*Can you give me some **advice** about buying a second-hand car?*

Not: ~~Can you give me some advices about buying a second-hand car?~~

Partitive nouns

Partitives are words used to show a part or quantity of something. They are used with uncountable nouns and pair words.

*I bought **a new pair of binoculars** last week.*

*They're advertising **two pairs of glasses** for the price of one.*

I bought four pairs of tights. Not ~~four tights~~.

*A **bit of/ piece** of advice.*

*A **glass of** water.*

*A **spoonful of** sugar.*

*We bought **a few bits/ pieces of** furniture.*

*A **bit of** luck. (small amount)*

***Two bits/ pieces of** information.*

***Two bottles of** milk.*

*He bought **three loaves of** bread.*

*A **slice of** toast.*

*A **jar of** jam.*

*A **tube of** toothpaste.*

*I think we'll need **five bags of** cement for the patio.*

*There's **a litre of** milk in the fridge for you. And I bought you a bar of chocolate.*

Countable and uncountable nouns with different meanings

Some nouns can be used either countably or uncountably, but with different meanings.

Compare

Countable use	Uncountable use
<i>An ice (an ice cream)</i>	<i>Ice on the road</i>
<i>We bought a new iron and an ironing board.</i>	<i>People believed that ships made of iron would sink.</i>
<i>A small business (a company)</i>	<i>To do business (to buy and sell)</i>
<i>I broke a glass yesterday.</i>	<i>The table was made of hardened glass.</i>
<i>Let's get a paper and see what's on at the cinema.</i>	<i>The printer has run out of paper.</i>
<i>'Hamlet' is one of Shakespeare's most famous works.</i>	<i>I had work to do so I couldn't go out.</i>