

Nouns— Countable & Noncountable

In English, some nouns are countable, and some nouns are noncountable. Simply put, you can add a number in front of a countable noun and you cannot add a number in front of a noncountable noun. For instance, you could accurately state that you had *one bowl of rice*, but you cannot accurately state that you had *one rice*.

Countable nouns may be preceded by *a/an* or *one* in the singular form. They also take a final *s/es* if the noun is plural.

A table
One table

Noncountable nouns are not preceded by *a/an* or *one*. Noncountable nouns have no plural form.

Some furniture

Many nouns that are noncountable represent a whole made of many parts. For instance, the word *furniture* means a whole group of furniture pieces, like tables, chairs, sofas, and so on.

I put *sugar* in my coffee.

The following is a short list of some nouns that are typically considered noncountable.

Abstractions	advice, beauty, confidence, courage, education, energy, enjoyment, evidence, fun, grammar, happiness, health, help, homework, honesty, hospitality, importance, information, intelligence, justice, knowledge, laughter, luck, music, news, patience, peace, pride, progress, proof, recreation, significance, slang, sleep, space, time, truth, violence, vocabulary, wealth, work
Activities	driving, studying, swimming, traveling, walking (and other gerunds)
Fields of Study	biology, chemistry, history, literature, mathematics, philosophy, psychology, sociology
Fluids	coffee, gasoline, milk, oil, tea, water
Gases	air, fog, hydrogen, oxygen, pollution, smog, steam
Languages	Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish
Natural Phenomena	dew, electricity, fire, fog, gravity, hail, heat, humidity, lightning, rain, sleet, snow, thunder, wind
Particles	chalk, dirt, dust, flour, grass, hair, sugar, wheat
Recreation	baseball, bridge, chess, football, poker, soccer, swimming
Solids	bread, butter, cheese, cotton, glass, gold, iron, wood
Whole Groups Made Up of Similar Items	baggage, clothing, equipment, food, furniture, garbage, hardware, jewelry, junk, money/cash/change, stuff

Using Articles

In English, there are three articles—*a*, *an*, *the*.

Use *the* if you have enough information to specifically identify the noun.

Count

Turn on *the* air conditioner.

We are going to *the* store tomorrow.

Noncountable

The furniture at that store is reasonably priced.

Use *a* or *an* if the noun refers to one item and if it is singular but not specific. Don't use *a* or *an* with plural or noncountable nouns.

Count

Bring *a* pen to work. You will write *an* essay about your day.

Using Quantifiers

Use a quantifier like *some*, *many*, or *enough* if the noun represents an unspecified amount of something or if the amount is more than one but not all items in a category.

Count (Plural)

Many showed us *some* pictures of Seattle.

Many birds return to the same nest every year.

Noncountable

We didn't get *enough* rain this year.

Using Nouns without Articles

Sometimes you don't need an article at all. If the noun represents all the items in a category or if the noun represents a category in general, you don't need an article.

Count (Plural)

Students can use the printer for free.

Noncountable

Air is a natural resource.

Works Cited

Azar, Betty S. and Stacy A. Hagan. *Understanding and Using English Grammar*. 4th edition. White Plains, New York: Pearson Longman, 2009. 530. Print.

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