What are count and noncount nouns?

If you were in our classes, we would say “Welcome!” and then ask you to teach us about writing in your native language. Using that knowledge, we would respectfully teach you the US approach to writing so that we could do our best to help you succeed in a US college.

Lynn Quitman Troyka
Doug Hesse

CHAPTER 39

Singulars and Plurals

39a What are count and noncount nouns?

**Count nouns** represent items that can be counted: *a radio or radios, a street or streets, an idea or ideas, a fingernail or fingernails.* Count nouns can be **SINGULAR or PLURAL.**

**Noncount nouns** name things that are thought of as a whole and not split into separate, countable parts: *rice, knowledge, traffic.* There are two important rules to remember about noncount nouns: (1) They’re never preceded by *a* or *an,* and (2) they are never plural. The Box 39-1 on page 496 lists eleven categories of uncountable items, giving examples in each category.

Some nouns can be count or noncount, depending on their meaning in a sentence. Most of these nouns name things that can be meant either individually or as “wholes” made up of individual parts.

**COUNT**  You have a *hair* on your sleeve. ([In this sentence, *hair* is meant as an individual, countable item.])

**NONCOUNT** Kioko has black *hair.* ([In this sentence, all the strands of *hair* are referred to as a whole.])

When editing your writing (see Chapter 3), make sure that you have not added a plural *-s* to any noncount nouns, which are always singular in form.

**ALERT:** Use a singular verb with any noncount noun that functions as the SUBJECT in a CLAUSE.

To check whether a noun is count or noncount, look it up in a dictionary such as the *American Heritage English as a Second Language Dictionary.*

495
How do I use determiners with singular and plural nouns?

Determiners, also called expressions of quantity, are used to tell how much or how many with reference to nouns. Other names for determiners include limiting adjectives, noun markers, and articles. (For information about articles—the words a, an, and the—see Chapter 40.)

Choosing the right determiner with a noun can depend on whether the noun is noncount or count (see 39a). For count nouns, you must also decide whether the noun is singular or plural.

**ALERTS:** (1) Many, most, and some require of the before a noun that is specific but not before a noun that is a generalization. (2) The phrases a few and a little convey the meaning “some”: I have a few rare books means “I have some rare books.” They are worth a little money means “They are worth some money.” (3) Without the word a, the words few and little convey the meaning “almost none”: I have few [or very few] books means “I have almost no books.” They are worth little money means “They are worth almost no money.”
How do I use determiners with singular and plural nouns?

**Using determiners with count and noncount nouns**

**Group 1: Determiners for Singular Count Nouns**

With singular count nouns, use any of the determiners on the left.

- *a, an, the*
  - a house, an egg; the house, the egg
- *one, any, some, every, each, either, neither, another, the other*
  - any book; each person; another year
- *my, our, your, his, her, its, their, nouns with ‘s or s’*
  - your father; its cover; Connie’s car
- *this, that*
  - this week; that desk
- *one, no, the first, the second, and so on*
  - one example; no reason; the fifth chair

**Group 2: Determiners for Plural Count Nouns**

All of the following determiners can be used with plural count nouns. Plural count nouns can also be used without determiners (43b).

- *the*
  - the bicycles; the rooms; the ideas
- *some, any, both, many, most, few, fewer, the fewest, a number of, other, several, all, all the, a lot of*
  - some people; many jobs; all managers
- *my, our, your, his, her, its, their, nouns with ‘s or s’*
  - our coats; her books; student’s grades
- *these, those*
  - these days; those computers
- *no, two, three, four, and so on; the first, the second, the third, and so on*
  - no exceptions; four students; the first month

**Group 3: Determiners for Noncount Nouns**

All of the following determiners can be used with noncount nouns (which are always singular). Noncount nouns can also be used without determiners (43b).

- *the*
  - the rice; the electricity
- *some, any, much, more, most, other, the other, little, less, the least, enough, all, all the, a lot of*
  - enough snow; a lot of equipment; more food
How do I use nouns as adjectives?

Nouns used as adjectives

Adjectives in English do not have plural forms. When you use an adjective with a plural noun, make the noun plural but not the adjective: the green [not greens] leaves. Be especially careful when you use a word as a modifier that can also function as a noun.

The bird’s wingspan is ten inches. [Inches is functioning as a noun.]
The bird has a ten-inch wingspan. [Inch is functioning as a modifier.]

Do not add -s (or -es) to the adjective even when it is modifying a plural noun or pronoun.

NO Many Americans students are basketball fans.
YES Many American students are basketball fans.

Exercise 39-1 Consulting all sections of this chapter, select the correct choice from the words in parentheses and write it in the blank.

Example At the beginning of every school year, all (student, students) students can expect (homework, homeworks) homework that teaches them about the toll-free No Bully hot line.

1. One of the main (reason, reasons) _____ for such a hot line is the change in tempers and violent capacities of (American, Americans) _____ students.
2. Because students are often bullied by a fellow classmate when outside the classroom, it is important that they receive (information, informations) _____ about how to react when confronted by such a threat.
3. Many a child in the (United State, United States) _____ is in danger not only of being teased and taunted by others but also of being the victim of a crime in which (blood, bloods) _____ is spilled, such as assault or robbery.
How do I use a, an, or the with singular count nouns?

4. Because (many, much) _____ classrooms are unsupervised after school hours, this (time, times) _____ becomes especially dangerous.
5. In a moment of danger, (ignorance, ignorances) _____ can be deadly, so the No Bully hot line was set up to give students (advice, advices) _____ on how to handle bullying and other threatening situations.

EXERCISE 39-2 Consulting all sections of this chapter, select the correct choice from the words in parentheses and write it in the blank.

EXAMPLE Because of their innate (intelligence, intelligences) intelligence, many (pet, pets) pets can often be very protective of the humans they love.
1. One of the most frightening (animal, animals) _____ is a poisonous (rattlesnake, rattlesnakes) _____, but not to a twelve-year-old retriever, Partner.
2. Longtime friends Nick and Ross, both eight years old, were chopping down a tree for a campfire when a (six-foot, six-feet) _____ rattlesnake fell from a branch.
3. Partner leaped over (dirt, dirts) _____ and (leave, leaves) _____ to get to the poisonous snake, which he attacked.
4. Verle, Nick’s father and Partner’s owner, was (many, much) _____ yards away when he heard the racket, and he rushed over just in time to see the rattler sink its fangs into Partner’s nose.
5. Within minutes, the rattler was killed by a bystander; and Partner, who showed a lot of (courage, courages) _____ and has now recovered, has become one of the best (friend, friends) _____ Nick and Ross have ever had.

CHAPTER 40 Articles

40a How do I use a, an, or the with singular count nouns?

The words a and an are called indefinite articles. The word the is called the definite article. Articles are one type of determiner. Articles signal that a noun will follow and that any modifiers between the article and the noun refer to that noun.

- a chair
- a brown chair
- a cold, metal chair
- the computer
- the teacher’s computer
- the lightning-fast computer