

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.

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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*.

BOX 39-1 SUMMARY



Uncountable items (noncount nouns)

GROUPS OF SIMILAR ITEMS	clothing, equipment, furniture, jewelry, junk, luggage, mail, money, stuff, traffic, vocabulary
ABSTRACTIONS	advice, equality, fun, health, ignorance, information, knowledge, news, peace, pollution, respect
LIQUIDS	blood, coffee, gasoline, water
GASES	air, helium, oxygen, smog, smoke, steam
MATERIALS	aluminum, cloth, cotton, ice, wood
FOOD	beef, bread, butter, macaroni, meat, pork
PARTICLES OR GRAINS	dirt, dust, hair, rice, salt, wheat
SPORTS, GAMES, ACTIVITIES	chess, homework, housework, reading, sailing, soccer
LANGUAGES	Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish
FIELDS OF STUDY	biology, computer science, history, literature, math
EVENTS IN NATURE	electricity, heat, humidity, moonlight, rain, snow, sunshine, thunder, weather

39b 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.”

BOX 39-2 SUMMARY



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



Using determiners with count and noncount nouns (*continued*)

my, our, your, his, her, its, their,
nouns with 's or s'

this, that

no, the first, the second, the best,
and so on

their fame; **India's** heat;
your leadership

this sugar; **that** fog

no smoking; **the first** rainfall;
the best vocabulary

39c 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.

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 (rattle-snake, 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, dirt) _____ 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