

Word-classes in English for Political Studies

Features of Nouns in E4PS – Part II

Here follow the main features of a C-noun compared to an U-noun:

Countable nouns [C]	Uncountable nouns [U]
✓ have singular and plural forms	✓ <u>only</u> have one form
✓ take singular and plural verbs	✓ <u>always</u> take a singular verb
✓ can have <i>a/an</i> (= indefinite article) and numbers in front of them	✓ <u>never</u> have <i>a/an</i> or a number <i>directly</i> in front of them
✓ have <i>many / a lot of / lots of</i> in front of them	✓ have <i>much / a lot of / lots of</i> in front of them
✓ have <i>few / a few</i> in front of them	✓ have <i>little / a little</i> in front of them
✓ have <i>some / any / no</i> in front of them (plural forms)	✓ have <i>some / any / no</i> in front of them

It can be useful to list **uncountable nouns** into the following categories:

- ✓ **substances**: *blood, glass, fuel, iron, gold, oil, petrol, plastic, water, wood, etc.;*
- ✓ **fibres**: *cotton, nylon, silk, wool, etc.;*
- ✓ **food**: *bread, chocolate, milk, spaghetti, sugar, etc.*
- ✓ **abstract ideas**: *access, finance, freedom, friendship, health, humour, love, peace, progress, profitability, surveillance, safety, etc.;*
- ✓ **weather conditions**: *fog, frost, hail, lightning, rain, snow, etc.;*
- ✓ **verbal nouns (i.e., -ing verbal forms used as nouns)**: *advertising, brainstorming, campaigning, catering, contact-tracing, decision-making, electioneering, marketing, offshoring, outsourcing, social distancing, training, etc.;*
- ✓ **subjects**: *biology, chemistry, economics, electronics, mathematics / maths, physics, politics, statistics, etc.;*
- ✓ **miscellanea**: *accommodation, advice, baggage, cash, damage, equipment, evidence, hardware, information, insurance, legislation,*

luggage, money, news, research, software, traffic, transport, travel, trouble, weather, etc.



Moreover note that:

- ① some words which are countable in some other languages are uncountable in English (e.g.: *advice, information, management, news*);
- ② some words can be used in two different ways – one countable, one uncountable (e.g.: *business, glass, hair, medicine, paper, time, work*);
- ③ **collective nouns** can take singular and plural verbs (e.g.: *bank, board, committee, firm, government, management, people, staff, team, etc.*)¹;
- ④ **to make countable quantities of uncountable nouns** you can:

a. use an adequate periphrasis, i.e. the formula “a/an + C-noun + of U-noun” as in the following examples:

- five litres of water;
- two bottles of wine;
- twenty euros of fuel;
- six phials of blood;
- a piece of information;
- an item of news;
- a word of advice;
- a body of evidence;
- a type of accommodation;
- an article of luggage;
- a bit of trouble;
- four items of reasearch;
- six processes of outsourcing;
- a source of finance;
- ten books of economics;
- three exercises of maths;
- two laws of physics;

¹ Remember that with collective nouns, AmE usually uses singular verbs, whereas BrE usually uses plural verbs.

- two types of malaria;

Apart from “an item of ...” and “a piece of ...” that can be used with almost all the U-nouns, each item needs an adequate periphrasis.



- b. use another similar word, i.e. a countable synonym (e.g. *work* → *a job / a task*; *progress* → *advances / improvements / a step forward*; *travel* → *a journey / a trip*; *research* → *analyses / investigations / studies*; *information* → *data / details / facts / figures*; *news* → *accounts / press releases / reports*; *legislation* → *laws / rules*; *advice* → *tips / suggestions / hints*);
- c. use a compound noun (e.g.: *training* → *a training course*; *insurance* → *an insurance policy*; *health* → *a health system*; *Covid-19* → *four Covid-19 variants*; *research* → *a research project / research facilities / research methods / research findings*).

A FOCUS ON WORK and WORKS

In most of its meanings, work is an uncountable noun, and so:

- it rarely comes after a or a number
- It is rarely used in the plural

It is very common for university students to get part-time work.

They want to relax after the pressure of their work.

I have much work to do.

Synonyms of work [U]: job, labour, employment, career, profession, occupation, trade

Work can be a countable noun when it means ‘something produced by a writer, painter, musician, or other artist’.

Rome has many works of Bernini.

Mary Shelley’s novel “Frankenstein” is considered a work of science fiction.

N.B. We can use the plural **works** to indicate:

- activities involving the building or repairing of something:

They expanded the shipyards and started engineering works.

The EU has updated the rules concerning public works contracts.

- a factory (often in compounds and with sing./pl. verb), i.e. a place where things are made or industrial processes take place:

a brickworks

a steelworks