Word-classes in English for Political Studies

Features of Nouns in E4PS – Part II

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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 *a/an* (= indefinite article) and numbers in front of them	✓ <u>never</u> have *a/an* or a number *directly* in front of them
✓ have *many / a lot of / lots of* in front of them	✓ have *much / a lot of / lots of* in front of them
✓ have *few / a few* in front of them	✓ have *little / a little* in front of them
✓ have *some / any / no* in front of them (plural forms)	✓ have *some / any / no* 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, cyberbullying, decision-making, electioneering, marketing, offshoring, outsourcing, policymaking, 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.

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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;

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

- two types of malaria;

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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; cyberbullying* ➜ *three cyberbullying cases/ cyberbullying causes, effects and remedies; 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