

## Word-classes in English for Visual and Performing Arts

### Features of Nouns in E4VPA

#### ✧ countable and/or uncountable

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

#### ✧ collective nouns<sup>1</sup>;

#### ✧ not so marked gender distinction<sup>2</sup>;

<sup>1</sup> Specifically, note that American English and other varieties of English differ in the way they handle collective nouns: these are nouns like 'family,' 'team,' 'government', etc. that refer to a group rather than to an individual. Because they do not show a plural ending, American English typically considers collective nouns as singular nouns; because they refer to a group, however, British English considers them as plural nouns. The following sentence, where 'team' is considered a singular noun (since the verb 'is exploring' is singular),

*The team is exploring both the starter and bullpen markets.*

is more typical of American English. By contrast, the following sentence, where 'team' is considered a plural noun (since the verb 'have generated' is plural),

*The team have generated a high-quality draft.*

is more typical of British English, though it also appears in American English, albeit less frequently.

<sup>2</sup> Note that the suffix -ess in few names of occupations such as *actress, hostess, manageress, waitress* shows that the person doing the job is a woman. Many people now avoid these. Instead, you can use *actor* or *host* (although *actress* and *hostess* are still very common), or a neutral word, such as *server* for *waiter* and *waitress*. Neutral words like *assistant, worker, person* or *officer* are now often used instead of *-man* or *-woman* in the names of jobs. For example, you can use *police officer* instead of *policeman* or *policewoman*, *spokesperson* instead of *spokesman* or *spokeswoman*, *businessperson* instead of *businessman* or *businesswoman*. Neutral words are very common in newspapers, on television and radio and in official writing, in both *British English* and *North American English*. Also, the gender-neutral honorific *Mx* has been added to common gendered honorifics, such as *Mr* and *Ms*, as a title for those who do not identify as being of a particular gender, or for people who simply don't want to be identified by gender.

- ✧ **compound nouns (e.g.: art gallery, singer songwriter);**
- ✧ **collocations (e.g.: wind instruments, food and drink);**
- ✧ **false friends (e.g.: library, facilities).**

## Main features of Countable Nouns [C]

- ✧ **they form standard plural with the ending -(e)s BUT remember:**
  - ◆ a set of nouns ending in **-s, -x, -ch, -sh, -o, or -z** where the ending **-es** is added for euphonic reasons: e.g. *class* → *classes*; *fax* → *faxes*; *watch* → *watches*; *clash* → *clashes*; *hero* → *heroes*; *buzz* → *buzzes*;
  - ◆ a set of nouns where the final consonant is followed by **-y**, a double spelling adaptation occurs – both in the final “y” of the word changing into “i” and in the ending itself where a euphonic “e” goes before final “s”: *country* → *countries*; *family* → *families*; *pottery* → *potteries*. However, such adaptation does not occur when a vowel is in front of the final -y: *boy* → *boys*; *day* → *days*; *play* → *plays*;
  - ◆ a small group of lexical items with a double spelling adaptation – both in the final “f” of the word changing into “v” and in the ending itself where a euphonic “e” goes before final “s” (e.g. *knife* → *knives*; *life* → *lives*; *shelf* → *shelves*). However, such adaptation is not a permanent feature: in fact, pay attention to *chief* → *chiefs*, *cliff* → *cliffs*; *roof* → *roofs*;
  - ◆ a set of nouns of **classical (Greek or Latin) origin** maintaining a classical plural formation, sometimes together with a standard plural formation in -s (e.g. *criterion* → *criteria*; *formula* → *formulae / formulas*; *millennium* → *millennia*; *stadium* → *stadiums/stadia*);
  - ◆ a set of nouns of **classical origin ending in -x** such as *appendix*, *index*, *matrix* with a double chance of plural formation: respectively, *appendices* and *appendixes*; *indices* and *indexes*; *matrices* and *matrixes*.
  - ◆ a set of nouns ending in **-sis** such as *analysis*, *basis*, *crisis*, *thesis* whose plural forms are respectively *analyses*, *bases*, *crises*, and *theses*;
  - ◆ a small group of nouns maintaining a **Germanic plural formation** (e.g. *child* → *children*; *goose* → *geese*; *foot* → *feet*; *louse* → *lice*<sup>3</sup>; *man* → *men*; *mouse* → *mice*<sup>4</sup>; *ox* → *oxen*; *tooth* → *teeth*; *woman* → *women*);

<sup>3</sup> The plural form *louses* can be used to refer to very unpleasant people.

<sup>4</sup> The plural form can be *mouses* only when referring to the small device used to control the movement of the cursor on a computer screen.

- ◆ a set of countable nouns which **only occur in the plural** and generally take a plural verb: e.g. *amenities, clothes, earnings, facilities, glasses, goods, headquarters, outskirts, overheads, premises, savings, trousers, valuables, works*.

## Main features of Uncountable nouns [U]

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, freedom, friendship, health, humour, love, peace, progress, safety, etc.*;
- ✓ **sports**: *cricket, cycling, football, golf, gymnastics, riding, skating, skiing, swimming, etc.*;
- ✓ **weather conditions**: *fog, frost, hail, lightning, rain, snow, etc.*;
- ✓ **verbal nouns (i.e., -ing verbal forms used as nouns)**: *advertising, brainstorming, carving, catering, cyberbullying, marketing, offshoring, outsourcing, training, etc.*;
- ✓ **subjects**: *arts, biology, chemistry, economics, electronics, mathematics / maths, physics, etc.*;
- ✓ **miscellanea**: *accommodation, advice, baggage, cash, damage, equipment, evidence, hardware, information, insurance, legislation, luggage, money, music, news, research, software, traffic, transport, travel, trouble, weather, etc.*

Note that:

- ① some words can be used in two different ways – one countable, one uncountable (e.g.: *business, glass, hair, medicine, paper, time, work*);
- ② **collective nouns** can take singular and plural verbs (e.g.: *bank, board, committee, firm, government, management, people, staff, team, etc.*)<sup>5</sup>;
- ③ **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:

<sup>5</sup> Remember that with collective nouns, AmE usually uses singular verbs, whereas BrE usually uses plural verbs.

- 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 research;
- six processes of outsourcing;
- ten books of economics;
- three exercises of maths;
- two laws of physics;
- 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*; *cyberbullying* → *three cyberbullying cases/ cyberbullying causes, effects and remedies*; *research* → *a research project / research facilities / research methods / research findings*).