

Countable and uncountable nouns 1

A Countable nouns

- Countable nouns include objects, people and units of measurement.
one bank, three banks one manager, two managers one metre, eight metres
- Countable nouns and their verbs can be singular or plural.
*One manager is in charge of the department.
Two managers are in charge of the department.*
- In speech we usually say *a/an* when there is one of something.
*I have to write a report this afternoon. (NOT ~~one report~~)
I got an email from him yesterday. (an before a vowel sound a, e, i, o, u)*
But we can use the word *one* when the exact number is important.
I only got one email from him, several weeks ago. He hasn't been in touch since then.

Half the people questioned in Scotland said they would like to receive **information** from their bosses to help them conquer colds and flu. And 66% of those surveyed said **advice** from work about healthy lunchtime eating and being active during their lunch break would encourage them to improve their health.

BBC website

B Uncountable nouns

- Uncountable nouns include materials and substances, abstract ideas, activities and feelings. 'Uncountable' means we cannot use numbers.
*water (NOT ~~one water, two waters~~)
progress (NOT ~~one progress, two progresses~~)*
- Uncountable nouns only have one form (no -s plural) and take a singular verb.
Progress on the project is quite slow. (NOT ~~are quite slow~~)
- Typical uncountable nouns are:

materials and substances	<i>air, coffee, cotton, oil, paper, plastic, rice, steel, water</i>
abstract ideas	<i>freedom, fun, health, life, progress, safety, space, time</i>
activities	<i>engineering, football, help, research, sleep, travel, work</i>
feelings	<i>anger, courage, happiness, honesty, hope, respect</i>

- Be careful! The nouns in the list below are uncountable in English but countable in many other languages.
accommodation, advertising, advice, baggage, behaviour, business, cash, equipment, furniture, hair, hardware, health, information, insurance, knowledge, luggage, machinery, money, permission, progress, research, software, traffic, travel, trouble, weather, work

C Determiners (*a/some/many/much, etc*)

- We use different determiners for countable and uncountable nouns.

Countable	Uncountable
<i>I need a dictionary.</i>	<i>I need some time.</i>
<i>We don't have many employees.</i>	<i>We don't do much research.</i>
<i>Give the waiter a few euros as a tip.</i>	<i>Give the waiter a little space for the vegetables.</i>
- So ~~an information~~ and ~~some informations~~ are wrong and *some information* is right.

Many employees feel the proposed changes give managers **too much** authority to change salaries and shift-work assignments.

Federal Computer Week website

Countable and uncountable nouns 2

'There's no *business* like show business, but there are several *businesses* like accounting.' – David Letterman, US comedian & television host.

The Quotations Page website

A Specific and general meanings

- Many nouns can have a specific meaning (where they are countable) and a general meaning (where they are uncountable).

Specific/countable

The machine is making a strange noise.
There aren't many spaces in the car park.
I bought a football for my son's birthday.
I've worked in many different businesses.

General/uncountable

We are reducing noise in the factory.
There isn't much space in my office.
Football is very popular in Italy.
Business is going well at the moment.

- Here are some more examples.

a coffee/coffee (a cup of coffee/the substance)
a fish/fish (one specific animal/a type of food)
a glass/glass (a container for a drink/the material)
a paper/paper (a newspaper or conference report/the material)
a wood/wood (a small forest/the material)
a work/work (a work of art/activity involving effort)

- Note in the examples above that in the general meaning we do not use the word *a*.

B Singular or plural verb? (*machine/machinery/company*)

- Countable nouns (like *machine*) can have a singular noun and verb, or a plural noun and verb.

The new machine is much faster./The new machines are much faster.

Uncountable nouns (like *machinery*) always have a singular verb.

The new machinery is much faster. (NOT are)

- Some nouns have a singular form (without *-s*), but they consist of more than one person/thing. Examples include: *army, audience, board, company, data, crowd, family, government, group, management, media, press, public, staff, team, union.*

These can be followed by either a singular or a plural verb.

The company is/are doing well at the moment.

C How to count an uncountable noun

- Uncountable nouns cannot be counted directly. However, we can count them using phrases like: *a piece of, a glass of, a bottle of, a kilo of, a barrel of.*

She gave me two pieces of information. (NOT two informations)

The US consumes about eighteen million barrels of oil each day. (NOT eighteen million oils)

- For many uncountable nouns there is a countable noun with a related meaning.

The advertising campaign cost a lot of money. (money is uncountable)

The advertising campaign cost half a million euros. (euro is countable)

I've done a lot of work since leaving university. (work is uncountable)

I've had three jobs since leaving university. (job is countable)

Air Canada allow each customer to check-in two pieces of luggage. The weight must be less than 32 kgs.

Air Canada website