

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</i> / <i>a lot of</i> / <i>lots of</i> in front of them	✓ have <i>much</i> / <i>a lot of</i> / <i>lots of</i> in front of them
✓ have <i>few</i> / <i>a few</i> in front of them	✓ have <i>little</i> / <i>a little</i> in front of them
✓ have <i>some</i> / <i>any</i> / <i>no</i> in front of them (plural forms)	✓ have <i>some</i> / <i>any</i> / <i>no</i> in front of them

✧ collective nouns¹;

✧ not so marked gender distinction²;

¹ 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.

² 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*³; *man* → *men*; *mouse* → *mice*⁴; *ox* → *oxen*; *tooth* → *teeth*; *woman* → *women*);

³ The plural form *louses* can be used to refer to very unpleasant people.

⁴ 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.*)⁵;
- 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:

⁵ 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*).