

Features of Nouns in VetMed English

**** part 2 ****

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Focus on uncountable nouns in English for Veterinary Medicine

Here follows the main features in the behaviour of a C-noun compared to a U-noun:

Countable nouns [C]	Uncountable nouns [U]
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ have singular and plural forms✓ take singular and plural verbs✓ can have <i>a/an</i> (= indefinite article) and numbers in front of them✓ have <i>many / a lot of / lots of*</i> / <i>several</i> in front of them✓ have <i>few / a few</i> in front of them*✓ have <i>some / any / no</i> in front of them (plural forms)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ <u>only</u> have one form✓ <u>always</u> take a singular verb✓ <u>never</u> have <i>a/an</i> or a number <i>directly</i> in front of them✓ have <i>much / a lot of / lots of*</i> / <i>several</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

* On the use of *much / many / a lot of / lots of*, and *few / a few / little / a little*, please look at the pictures 3 and 4 below.

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

- ✓ **substances**: *blood, glass, iron, gold, oil, oxygen, plasma, plastic, water, wax, etc.*;
- ✓ **abstract ideas**: *access, evidence, freedom, health, humour, love, progress, relevance, safety, etc.*;
- ✓ **verbal nouns (i.e. -ing verbal forms used as nouns)**: *hunting, guarding, retrieving, herding, training, rendering, neutering, spaying, breathing, coughing, laying / hatching, foaling, farrowing, etc.* as well as all the verbal nouns indicating the act of parturition of an animal
 - ↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ see the handouts 1 and 2,
✧ unit 2a, a.y. 2025/2026;
- ✓ **diseases**: *BSE, chickenpox, influenza¹, leishmaniosis², Lyme disease, measles, rabies, salmonellosis, smallpox, etc.*;
- ✓ **subjects**: *biology, chemistry, etiology, mathematics / maths, physics, statistics, etc.*;
- ✓ **miscellanea**: *accommodation, advice, damage, equipment, eradication, exposure, hardware, information, money, news, research, software, traffic, training, transport, travel, weather, work, etc.*

In addition, note that:

- ① some words which are countable in some other languages are uncountable in English (e.g. *advice, information, management, news, etc.*);
- ② some words can be used in two different ways – one countable, one uncountable (e.g. *analysis, business, contagion, glass, infection, hair, medicine, meal, paper, time, work, paper, etc.*);
- ③ **collective nouns** can take singular and plural verbs (e.g.: *board, committee, government, team; cattle, flock, herd,*

¹ Note that the noun *cold* is considered a C-noun even if it is most commonly used in its singular form. See <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/> at the item "cold" and open the window "Collocations" to discover other illness-related expressions.

² Also spelled *leishmaniasis*.

*livestock, pack, poultry, wildlife/wild fauna*³); and some of them (e.g.: *board, committee, government, herd, flock, offspring*⁴, *team*) are considered regular C-nouns, thus having a plural form of their own. Also *Chordata*⁵, *Mammalia*⁶, *Reptilia*⁷, *Rodentia*⁸ and so on are collective nouns.

④ **to make countable quantities of uncountable nouns** you can choose among the following solutions according to the message that needs to be conveyed in that specific context:

1. a periphrastic formula "a/an ... of" can be used:

- advice [U-noun] → a word of advice;
- an(a)esthesia /,ænəs'ti:ziə/ [U-noun] → two doses / shots / injections of an(a)esthesia
- blood [U-noun] → a drop of blood; two sacks of blood; six phials / vial of blood, a litre / liter of blood ...
- cattle [collective noun] → a herd of cattle; 10 heads of cattle; four herds of cattle ...
- contagion [U-noun] → a route / risk of contagion ...
- corn [U-noun] → 100 sheaves⁹ /jɪ:vz/ / ears of corn; a field of corn ...
- diabetes [U-noun] → two cases / forms / types of diabetes
- DNA [U-noun] → two strands of DNA ...

³ These lexical collocations are synonyms, and "fauna selvatica" and/or "animali selvatici" are their **equivalents in Italian**.

⁴ Note that the plural form of both *herd* and *offspring* as C-nouns is always *herd* and *offspring*, respectively (see <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>).

⁵ The **phylum** of the animal kingdom that includes a large number of animal species, including humans.

⁶ A taxonomic **class** within the superclass Tetrapoda – the mammals – coined by Carl Linnaeus in 1758 as a replacement for his earlier class Quadrupedia.

⁷ A taxonomic **class** including, among others, today's turtles, crocodilians, snakes, lizards, and their extinct relatives. The study of these traditional reptile orders, historically combined with that of modern amphibians, is called herpetology

⁸ A taxonomic **order** including, among others, mice, rats, squirrels, prairie dogs, chipmunks, porcupines, beavers, Guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils and capybaras.

⁹ *Sheaves* is the plural form of *sheaf*.

- evidence [U-noun] → a body of / an item of / a piece of evidence¹⁰ ...
⇒⇒⇒⇒ see "Gli scienziati del coronavirus cinese", unit 7, a.y. 2025/2026
- farrowing [U-noun] → an act of parturition of a sow
- foaling [U-noun] → acts of parturition of a mare
- fever / pyrexia / temperature [U-noun] → a bout of fever / bouts of fever; ...
- glue [U-noun] → a tube of glue ...
- hair [U-noun] → a lock / wisp of hair; ...
- information [U-noun] → two pieces / items / nuggets of information; ...
- livestock [collective noun] → 6 heads of livestock; a herd of livestock, six herd of livestock ...
- neutering / spaying [U-noun] → six surgeries of neutering / spaying; ...
- news [U-noun] → an item / a piece of news; ...
- oxygen /'ɒksɪdʒən/ [U-noun] → a tank of oxygen ...
- physics [U-noun] → ten books / chapters / exercises / formulae / pages of physics; ...
- rabies [U-noun] → two types / forms / cases of rabies ...
- research [U-noun] → four items / pieces of research; ...
- RNA [initialism and U-noun] → three types of RNA ...
- shedding¹¹ [U-noun] → a period of shedding ...

¹⁰ **Equivalents in Italian:** "prova", "traccia".

¹¹ **Viral shedding** is the expulsion and release of virus progeny following successful reproduction during a host cell infection. Once replication has been completed and the host cell is exhausted of all resources in making viral progeny, the viruses may begin to leave the cell by several methods. The term is variously used to refer to viral particles shedding from a single cell, from one part of the body into another, and from a body into the environment, where the virus may infect another. **Equivalents in Italian:** "shedding virale", "escrezione virale", "rilascio del virus".

Vaccine shedding is a form of viral shedding which can occur in instances of infection caused by some attenuated (or "live virus") vaccines.

Moreover, when an animal loses naturally its skin or hair, or a plant loses naturally leaves, the scientific verbs are "to molt" ("to moult" in BrE) and "to shed" and the U-nouns describing such an event are **molting** ("moulting" in BrE) and **shedding**.

Equivalent in Italian: "muta", "caduta (delle foglie)".

- shortage → a period of shortage ...
- wheat [U-noun] → twenty-one bunches of wheat; ...

Apart from "an item of ..." and "a piece of ..." that can be used with most U-nouns, each U-noun needs an adequate periphrasis in accordance with the contexts where it is used (you may look for a solution browsing through <https://ozdic.com/>).

b) a similar countable word – namely, a synonym:

- Chordata /kɔː'deɪtə/ → chordates ...
- exposure¹² → contacts; ...
- farrowing → births; deliveries
- information → data; details; facts; figures ...
- Mammalia → mammals ...
- news → data; details; ...
- progress → a step forward; ...
- poultry → chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys ...
- Reptilia → reptiles ...
- research → studies; investigations; analyses; publications; works; essays; surveys ...
- Rodentia → rodents ...
- shedding → a viral release, a virus release ...
- shedding / mo(u)lting → a fur / hair / skin loss ...
- shortage → lacks; shortfalls ...
- significance → significant data / facts / figures / levels / points ...
- wildlife /wild fauna → wild animals
- work → a job; a task ...

¹² **Equivalents in Italian:** "contatto/-i", "contagio"; the sentence *prolonged exposure to harmful radiation* can be translated as "esposizione prolungata a radiazioni dannose".

MEASURE WORDS

a grain of	sand rice salt
a bottle of	water soda wine
a piece of	advice furniture luggage
a cup of	coffee tea milk
a slice of	bread meat cheese

Why do we use measure words?

We don't make uncountable nouns into plurals, but we still need a way to quantify/count them.

That's why we use measure words!

We can use a measure word to count or quantify an uncountable noun!

✗ I'm going on vacation, I'm taking two luggages.
 ✓ I'm going on vacation, I'm taking two pieces of luggage.

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picture 1

MEASURE WORDS

a bar of	chocolate gold soap	a bowl of	cereal rice soup
a drop of	blood oil water	a grain of	rice sand truth
a cup of	coffee tea milk	a bottle of	water soda wine
a glass of	water milk soda	a slice of	bread meat cheese
a piece of	advice furniture luggage	a bag of	sugar flour rice
a carton of	ice cream milk juice	a roll of	tape toilet paper

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picture 2

c) a similar expression – namely, a synonymic compound word

⇒⇒⇒⇒ see unit 4a, "Notes on Compound Nouns", a.y. 2025/2026:

- blood → a blood clot; a blood test / analysis ...
- contagion → contagion risks ...
- DNA → a DNA sample; DNA tests; two DNA strands ...
- eradication [U-noun] → eradication measures / policies / procedures / programmes / protocols ...
- exposure → exposure levels ...
- farrowing → farrowing nests / cages ...
- hunting → hunting dogs/ expeditions / grounds / knives / parties / seasons ...
- incubation → incubation period ...
- morbidity → a morbidity rate¹³, ...
- oxygen → two oxygen molecules; ten oxygen tanks; oxygen indicators ...
- rendering¹⁴ → a rendering process; rendering facilities / practices / systems ...
- maintenance /'meɪntənəns/ → a maintenance host¹⁵ ...

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¹³ **Equivalents in Italian:** "tasso di morbilità", "tasso di incidenza", "tasso di diffusione".

¹⁴ The verbal noun "rendering" comes from the verb "to render" whose equivalents in Italian are "trasformare", "sciogliere".

Equivalents in Italian: "rendering", "processo industriale di trasformazione di sottoprodotti crudi di origine animale".

¹⁵ A maintenance host is defined as a species in which infection is endemic and is usually transferred from animal to animal by direct contact. **Equivalent in Italian:** "ospite di mantenimento".

Compare such a concept with **1) reservoir** /'rezəvwa:(r)/ **host:** an organism that harbors a pathogen but suffers no ill effects. However, it serves as a source of infection to other species that are susceptible, with important implications for disease control. A single reservoir host may be reinfected several times.

Equivalent in Italian: "ospite serbatoio"; and **2) spillover infection** (also known as **pathogen spillover** and **spillover event**), occurring when a reservoir population with a high pathogen prevalence comes into contact with a novel host population. The pathogen is transmitted from the reservoir population and may or may not be transmitted within the host population. Spillover is a common event: in fact, more than two-thirds of human viruses are zoonotic. Most spillover events result in self-

- shedding → a shedding process ...
- shooling / schooling → shooling / schooling behavio(u)rs ...
- shortage /'ʃɔ:tɪdʒ/ → shortage levels ...
- significance /sig'nɪfɪkəns/ → keypoints; key data / facts / figures / numbers / words ...
- spawn → spawn cycles ...
- spillover → spillover infections / effects / events / zoonoses ...
- surveillance /sɜ:'veɪləns/ → surveillance devices / procedures / protocols / systems ...
- training → a training course / session ...

Much	Many
<p>Much is used with uncountable nouns to indicate a large quantity. It is mostly used in negative questions or sentences.</p> <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much is the entrance fee? • She doesn't visit much anymore. • Don't rely too much on others. • How much is it, Mum? • It doesn't need much milk. • I feel much worse now. 	<p>The word many means a lot of. We use many with plural nouns.</p> <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does she want many dresses? • How many cars in the gallery? • Mary has many cats. • I have many things to do. • How many people are there in the World? • There aren't many women priests.
A lot of	Lots of
<p>A lot of means a large number of amount. It can be used for countable or uncountable nouns (negative, positive and question)</p> <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They've got a lot of orange juice. • There is a lot of money in my bag. • I have a lot of pencils. • I have a lot of time. • I drank a lot of water. 	<p>A lot of and lots of have the same meaning lots of means a large number of amount. It can be used for countable or uncountable nouns (negative, positive and question)</p> <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of people went to the game. • There were lots of jobs. • Listening to music is lots of fun. • There is lots of milk in the bucket. • I have lots of cars.
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picture 3

Using **A little, Little, A few, Few**

A little	Little
<p>A little is used with positive quantity and non-countable nouns. It means "a small amount" or "some".</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a little milk in the refrigerator • Would you like a little water? • Mary got a little bit of pie. • Can't you discount it a little? 	<p>Little expresses a diminutive size or a negative quantity. Little means "almost nothing" or "not much".</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm sorry, I speak little French. • There was little time to finish my homework. • The kitten is little. • I have drunk little water this morning.
A few	Few
<p>A few represents a positive quantity. It is used with plural nouns. It means some, a small amount.</p> <p>A few + Plural Countable Nouns</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He has a few good friends so he is happy. • There are a few books on the shelf. • We stayed a few days in Paris and visited the Eiffel Tower. 	<p>Few represents a negative quantity or shortage. It is used with plural countable nouns. It means not many, not enough.</p> <p>Few + Plural Countable Nouns</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have got few friends in the city so I am lonely. • They have got few cake on the table. • He has few photos on Instagram.
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picture 4

limited cases with no further human-to-human transmission, as occurs, for example, with rabies, anthrax, histoplasmosis or hidatidosis. Other zoonotic pathogens are able to be transmitted by humans to produce secondary cases and even to establish limited chains of transmission. Some examples are the Ebola and Marburg filoviruses, the MERS and SARS coronaviruses or some avian flu viruses. **Equivalents in Italian:** "evento spillover", "salto di specie".