

Word-classes in English for Communication Professionals

Features of Nouns in E4CP – Part II

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 directly 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

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

- ✓ **substances**: *blood, glass, fuel, oil, petrol, plastic, water, wood, etc.;*
- ✓ **metals**: *iron, gold, silver, copper, steel, etc.*
- ✓ **fibres**: *cotton, nylon, silk, wool, etc.;*
- ✓ **food**: *bread, butter, chocolate, milk, rice, spaghetti, salt, sugar, etc.*
- ✓ **abstract ideas**: *access, finance, freedom, friendship, health, humour, love, peace, progress, profitability, 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, campaigning, catering, cyberbullying, decision-making, e-learning, film-making, ghosting, marketing, offshoring, outsourcing, training, etc.;*
- ✓ **subjects**: *biology, chemistry, economics, electronics, mathematics / maths, physics, politics, statistics, etc.;*

- ✓ **diseases:** *chickenpox, cold, coronavirus, Covid-19, fever, gastritis, influenza, malaria, rabies, rubella, 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.*)¹;
- 3) **to quantify uncountable nouns, i.e. to make countable quantities of uncountable nouns** you can:
 - a) use an adequate periphrasis, i.e. the **formula “a/an/number + C-noun + of + U-noun”** as in the following examples:
 - five litres of water;
 - two bottles of wine;
 - fifty 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;
 - a source of finance;
 - ten books of economics;

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

- three exercises of maths;
- two laws of physics;
- two types of malaria;

b) use another similar word, i.e. a **countable synonym**:

- *advice* → *tips / suggestions / hints*;
- *freedom* → *liberties*;
- *information* → *data / details / facts / figures*;
- *legislation* → *laws / rules*;
- *news* → *accounts / press releases / reports*;
- *progress* → *advances / improvements / a step forward*;
- *research* → *analyses / investigations / studies*;
- *travel* → *a journey / a trip*;
- *work* → *a job / a task*;

c) use a **compound noun**

- *Covid-19* → *four Covid-19 variants*;
- *cyberbullying* → *three cyberbullying cases/ cyberbullying causes, effects and remedies*;
- *health* → *a health system*;
- *insurance* → *an insurance policy*;
- *research* → *a research project / research facilities / research methods / research findings*;
- *training* → *a training course*.

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