Word-classes in English for Political Studies

Features of Nouns in E4PS – 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	✓ only have one form
✓ take singular and plural verbs	✓ always take a singular verb
✓ can have *a/an* (= indefinite article) and numbers in front of them	✓ never have *a/an* or a number ***directly*** in front of them
✓ have *many / a lot of / lots of* in front of them	✓ have *much / a lot of / lots of* in front of them
✓ have *few / a few* in front of them	✓ have *little / a little* in front of them
✓ have *some / any / no* in front of them (plural forms)	✓ have *some / any / no* 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*, *electioneering*, *marketing*, *offshoring*, *outsourcing*, *policymaking*, *swimming*, *training*, etc.;
- ✓ subjects: *biology*, *chemistry*, *economics*, *electronics*, *mathematics / maths*, *physics*, *politics*, *statistics*, etc.;

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- ✓ 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 + C-noun + of + U-noun"** as in the following examples:
      - 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;
      - 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.

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- 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.*

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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

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