

Countable and uncountable nouns (2)

A Many nouns can be used as countable or uncountable nouns, usually with a difference in meaning. Compare:

Countable	Uncountable
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Did you hear a noise just now? (= a particular noise) ● I bought a paper to read. (= a newspaper) ● There's a hair in my soup! (= one single hair) ● You can stay with us. There is a spare room. (= a room in a house) ● I had some interesting experiences while I was away. (= things that happened to me) ● Enjoy your holiday. Have a good time! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I can't work here. There's too much noise. (<i>not</i> 'too many noises') ● I need some paper to write on. (= material for writing on) ● You've got very long hair. (<i>not</i> 'hairs') (= all the hair on your head) ● You can't sit here. There isn't room. (= space) ● They offered me the job because I had a lot of experience. (<i>not</i> 'experiences') ● I can't wait. I haven't got time.

B Coffee/tea/beer/juice etc. (drinks) are normally uncountable:

- I don't drink coffee very often.

But they can be countable when you are thinking of a **cup** / a **glass** etc. So you can say:

- (*in a restaurant*) Two coffees and an orange juice, please.

C There are some nouns that are usually uncountable in English but often countable in other languages. For example:

accommodation	behaviour	damage	luck	permission	traffic
advice	bread	furniture	luggage	progress	weather
baggage	chaos	information	news	scenery	work

These nouns are usually *uncountable*, so:

i) you cannot use **a/an** with them (you cannot say 'a bread', 'an advice' etc.) and

ii) they are not normally plural (we do not say 'breads', 'advices' etc.):

- I'm going to buy some **bread**. or ...a loaf of **bread**. (*not* 'a bread')
- Enjoy your holiday! I hope you have good **weather**. (*not* 'a good weather')
- Where are you going to put all your **furniture**? (*not* 'furnitures')

News is uncountable, not plural:

- The **news** was very depressing. (*not* 'the news were')

Travel (*noun*) means 'travelling in general'. You cannot say 'a travel' to mean a journey or a trip:

- We had a very good **journey**. (*not* 'a good travel')

Compare these countable and uncountable nouns:

Countable	Uncountable
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I'm looking for a job. ● What a beautiful view! ● It's a nice day today. ● We had a lot of bags and cases. ● These chairs are mine. ● It was a good suggestion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I'm looking for work. (<i>not</i> 'a work') ● What beautiful scenery! ● It's nice weather today. ● We had a lot of luggage. (<i>not</i> 'luggages') ● This furniture is mine. ● It was good advice.

EXERCISES

69.1 Which of the underlined parts of these sentences is correct?

- 1 'Did you hear noise / a noise just now?' 'No, I didn't hear anything.' ('a noise' is correct)
- 2 a If you want to know the news, you can read paper / a paper.
b I want to write some letters but I haven't got a paper / any paper to write on.
- 3 a I thought there was somebody in the house because there was light / a light on inside.
b Light / A light comes from the sun.
- 4 a I was in a hurry this morning. I didn't have time / a time for breakfast.
b 'Did you enjoy your holiday?' 'Yes, we had wonderful time / a wonderful time.'
- 5 Sue was very helpful. She gave us some very useful advice / advices.
- 6 We had very good weather / a very good weather while we were on holiday.
- 7 We were very unfortunate. We had bad luck / a bad luck.
- 8 It's very difficult to find a work / job at the moment.
- 9 Our travel / journey from London to Istanbul by train was very tiring.
- 10 When the fire alarm rang, there was total chaos / a total chaos.
- 11 I had to buy a / some bread because I wanted to make some sandwiches.
- 12 Bad news don't / doesn't make people happy.
- 13 Your hair is / Your hairs are too long. You should have it / them cut.
- 14 Nobody was hurt in the accident but the damage / the damages to the car was / were quite bad.

69.2 Complete the sentences using these words. Sometimes you need the plural (-s).

chair experience experience furniture hair information
job luggage permission progress work

- 1 I didn't have much luggage... - just two small bags.
- 2 They'll tell you all you want to know. They'll give you plenty of
- 3 There is room for everybody to sit down. There are plenty of
- 4 We have no, not even a bed or a table.
- 5 'What does Alan look like?' 'He's got a long beard and very short
- 6 Carla's English is better than it was. She's made
- 7 George is unemployed. He's looking for a
- 8 George is unemployed. He's looking for
- 9 If you want to leave work early, you have to ask for
- 10 I don't think Ann will get the job. She hasn't got enough
- 11 Rita has done many interesting things. She should write a book about her

69.3 What do you say in these situations? Complete the sentences using one of the words from Section C.

- 1 Your friends have just arrived at the station. You can't see any suitcases or bags. You ask them: Have you got any luggage?
- 2 You go into the tourist office. You want to know about places to see in the town. You say: I'd like
- 3 You are a student at school. You want your teacher to advise you about which examinations to take. You say: Can you give me
- 4 You want to watch the news on TV but you don't know what time it is on. You ask your friend: What time
- 5 You are standing at the top of a mountain. You can see a very long way. It's lovely. You say: It, isn't it?
- 6 You look out of the window. The weather is horrible: cold, wet and windy. You say to your friend: What

Countable nouns with **a/an** and **some**

A

Countable nouns can be *singular* or *plural*:

a dog	a child	the evening	this party	an umbrella
dogs	some children	the evenings	these parties	two umbrellas

B

Before singular countable nouns you can use **a/an**:

- Goodbye! Have a nice evening.
- Do you need an umbrella?

You cannot use singular countable nouns alone (without **a/the/my** etc.):

- She never wears a hat. (*not* 'She never wears hat')
- Be careful of the dog. (*not* 'Be careful of dog')
- What a beautiful day!
- I've got a headache.

C

We use **a/an...** to say what kind of thing or person something/somebody is:

- A dog is an animal.
- I'm an optimist.
- Tim's father is a doctor.
- Are you a good driver?
- Jill is a really nice person.
- What a lovely dress!

We say that somebody has a long nose / a nice face / a strong heart etc.:

- Jack has got a long nose. (*not* 'the long nose')

In sentences like these, we use plural nouns alone (*not* with 'some'):

- Dogs are animals.
- Most of my friends are students.
- Jill's parents are really nice people.
- What awful shoes!
- Jack has got blue eyes. (*not* 'the blue eyes')

Remember to use **a/an** when you say what somebody's job is:

- Sandra is a nurse. (*not* 'Sandra is nurse')
- Would you like to be an English teacher?

D

You can use **some** with plural countable nouns. We use **some** in two ways:

i) **Some** = a number of / a few of / a pair of:

- I've seen some good films recently. (*not* 'I've seen good films')
- Some friends of mine are coming to stay at the weekend.
- I need some new sunglasses. (= a new pair of sunglasses)

Do *not* use **some** when you are talking about things in general (see also Unit 74):

- I love bananas. (*not* 'some bananas')
- My aunt is a writer. She writes books. (*not* 'some books')

Sometimes you can make sentences with or without **some** (with no difference in meaning):

- There are (some) eggs in the fridge if you're hungry.

ii) **Some** = some *but not all*

- Some children learn very quickly. (but not all children)
- Some police officers in Britain carry guns, but most of them don't.

EXERCISES

70.1 What are these things? Try and find out if you don't know.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1 an ant? <i>It's an insect.</i> | 7 Earth? Mars? Venus? Jupiter? |
| 2 ants? bees? <i>They're insects.</i> | |
| 3 a cauliflower? | 8 a tulip? |
| 4 chess? | 9 the Rhine? the Nile? the Mississippi? |
| 5 a violin? a trumpet? a flute? | |
| | 10 a pigeon? an eagle? a crow? |
| 6 a skyscraper? | |

Who were these people?

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| 11 Beethoven? <i>He was a composer.</i> | 15 Marilyn Monroe? |
| 12 Shakespeare? | 16 Elvis Presley? John Lennon? |
| 13 Albert Einstein? | |
| 14 Washington? Lincoln? John Kennedy? | 17 Van Gogh? Renoir? Gauguin? |
| | |

70.2 Read about what these people do and say what their jobs are. Choose one of these jobs:

driving instructor interpreter journalist ~~nurse~~ pilot plumber
 travel agent waiter

- 1 Stella looks after patients in hospital. *She's a nurse.*
- 2 George works in a restaurant. He brings the food to the tables. He
- 3 Mary arranges people's holidays for them. She
- 4 Ron works for an airline. He flies aeroplanes.
- 5 Linda teaches people how to drive.
- 6 Dave fits and repairs water pipes.
- 7 Jenny writes articles for a newspaper.
- 8 John translates what people are saying from one language into another, so that they can understand each other.

70.3 Put in a/an or some where necessary. If no word is necessary, leave the space empty (-).

- 1 I've seen *some* good films recently.
- 2 What's wrong with you? Have you got *a* headache?
- 3 I know a lot of people. Most of them are *.....* students.
- 4 When I was *.....* child, I used to be very shy.
- 5 Would you like to be *.....* actor?
- 6 Do you collect *.....* stamps?
- 7 What *.....* beautiful garden!
- 8 *.....* birds, for example the penguin, cannot fly.
- 9 I've been walking for three hours. I've got *.....* sore feet.
- 10 I don't feel very well this morning. I've got *.....* sore throat.
- 11 It's a pity we haven't got *.....* camera. I'd like to take *.....* photograph of that house.
- 12 Those are *.....* nice shoes. Where did you get them?
- 13 I'm going shopping. I want to buy *.....* new shoes.
- 14 You need *.....* visa to visit *.....* countries, but not all of them.
- 15 Jane is *.....* teacher. Her parents were *.....* teachers too.
- 16 Do you enjoy going to *.....* concerts?
- 17 When we got to the city centre, *.....* shops were still open but most of them were closed.
- 18 I don't believe him. He's *.....* liar. He's always telling *.....* lies.

67.2

- 2 I fell asleep watching television.
- 3 The man slipped getting off a bus.
- 4 I got wet walking home in the rain.
- 5 Margaret had an accident driving to work yesterday.
- 6 Two firemen were overcome by smoke trying to put out the fire.

67.3

- 2 Having bought our tickets, we went into the theatre.
- 3 Having had dinner, they continued their journey.
- 4 Having done all her shopping, Lucy went for a cup of coffee.

67.4

- 2 Thinking they might be hungry, I offered them something to eat.
- 3 Being a foreigner, she needs a visa to stay in this country.
- 4 Not knowing his address, I wasn't able to contact him.
- 5 Having travelled a lot, Sarah knows a lot about other countries.
- 6 Not being able to understand English, the man didn't know what I wanted.
- 7 Having spent nearly all our money, we couldn't afford to stay in a hotel.

UNIT 68**68.1**

- 3 a very nice restaurant
- 4 *right*
- 5 a toothbrush
- 6 a bank
- 7 an insurance company
- 8 *right*
- 9 *right*
- 10 a petrol station
- 11 a problem
- 12 an interview for a job
- 13 a necklace
- 14 a very good game

68.2

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| 3 a key | 8 a letter |
| 4 a coat | 9 blood |
| 5 sugar | 10 a question |
| 6 a biscuit | 11 a moment |
| 7 electricity | 12 a decision |

68.3

- | | |
|-----------|--------------|
| 2 days | 8 air |
| 3 meat | 9 patience |
| 4 a queue | 10 languages |
| 5 letters | 11 countries |
| 6 friends | 12 space |
| 7 people | |

UNIT 69**69.1**

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 2 a a paper | |
| b any paper | |
| 3 a a light | |
| b Light | |
| 4 a time | |
| b a wonderful time | |
| 5 advice | |
| 6 very good weather | |
| 7 bad luck | |
| 8 job | |
| 9 journey | |
| 10 total chaos | |
| 11 some | |
| 12 doesn't | |
| 13 Your hair is ... it | |
| 14 the damage ... was | |

69.2

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| 2 information | 7 job |
| 3 chairs | 8 work |
| 4 furniture | 9 permission |
| 5 hair | 10 experience |
| 6 progress | 11 experiences |

69.3

- 2 I'd like some information about places to see (in this town).
- 3 Can you give me some advice about which examinations to take? / ...some advice about examinations?
- 4 What time is the news (on TV)?
- 5 It's a beautiful view, isn't it? *or* It's beautiful scenery, isn't it?
- 6 What horrible weather!

UNIT 70**70.1**

- 3 It's a vegetable.
- 4 It's a game.
- 5 They're musical instruments.
- 6 It's a (tall/high) building.
- 7 They're planets.
- 8 It's a flower.
- 9 They're rivers.
- 10 They're birds.
- 12 He was a writer / a dramatist / a playwright.
- 13 He was a scientist / a physicist.
- 14 They were American presidents / presidents of the United States.
- 15 She was an actress / a film actress / a film star.
- 16 They were singers/musicians.
- 17 They were painters/artists.

70.2

- 2 He's a waiter.
- 3 She's a travel agent.
- 4 He's a pilot.

- 5 She's a driving instructor.
- 6 He's a plumber.
- 7 She's a journalist.
- 8 He's an interpreter.

70.3

- 4 a
- 5 an
- 6 - (collect stamps)
- 7 a
- 8 Some
- 9 - (I've got sore feet.)
- 10 a
- 11 a ... a
- 12 - (Those are nice shoes.)
- 13 some
- 14 a visa ... *some* countries
- 15 a teacher. Her parents were teachers too.
- 16 - (going to concerts)
- 17 some
- 18 a liar ... always telling lies

UNIT 71**71.1**

- 1 ...and a magazine. The newspaper is in my bag but I don't know where I put the magazine.
- 2 I saw an accident this morning. A car crashed into a tree. The driver of the car wasn't hurt but the car was badly damaged.
- 3 ...a blue one and a grey one. The blue one belongs to my neighbours; I don't know who the owner of the grey one is.
- 4 My friends live in an old house in a small village. There is a beautiful garden behind the house. I would like to have a garden like that.

71.2

- | | |
|-------|----------------|
| 1 a a | 4 a an ... The |
| b the | b the |
| c the | c the |
| 2 a a | 5 a the |
| b a | b a |
| c the | c a |
| 3 a a | |
| b the | |
| c the | |

71.3

- 2 the dentist
- 3 the door
- 4 a mistake
- 5 the bus station
- 6 a problem
- 7 the post office
- 8 the floor
- 9 the book
- 10 a job in a bank