

## Countable and uncountable 1

A

A noun can be *countable* or *uncountable*:*Countable*

- I eat **a banana** every day.
- I like **bananas**.

**Banana** is a *countable* noun.A countable noun can be singular (**banana**) or plural (**bananas**).

We can use numbers with countable nouns. So we can say 'one banana', 'two bananas' etc.

Examples of nouns usually countable:

- Kate was singing **a song**.
- There's **a nice beach** near here.
- Do you have **a ten-pound note**?
- It wasn't your fault. It was **an accident**.
- There are no **batteries** in the radio.
- We don't have enough **cups**.

*Uncountable*

- I eat **rice** every day.
- I like **rice**.

**Rice** is an *uncountable* noun.An uncountable noun has only one form (**rice**).

We cannot use numbers with uncountable nouns. We cannot say 'one rice', 'two rices' etc.

Examples of nouns usually uncountable:

- Kate was listening to (some) **music**.
- There's **sand** in my shoes.
- Do you have any **money**?
- It wasn't your fault. It was bad **luck**.
- There is no **electricity** in this house.
- We don't have enough **water**.

B

You can use **a/an** with singular countable nouns:**a beach**    **a student**    **an umbrella**You cannot use singular countable nouns alone (without **a/the/my** etc.):

- I want **a banana**. (*not* I want banana)
- There's been **an accident**. (*not* There's been accident)

You can use *plural* countable nouns alone:

- I like **bananas**. (= bananas in general)
- Accidents** can be prevented.

You cannot normally use **a/an** with uncountable nouns. We do not say 'a sand', 'a music', 'a rice'.But you can often use **a ... of**. For example:**a bowl / a packet / a grain** of riceYou can use uncountable nouns alone (without **the/my/some** etc.):

- I eat **rice** every day.
- There's **blood** on your shirt.
- Can you hear **music**?

C

You can use **some** and **any** with plural countable nouns:

- We sang **some songs**.
- Did you buy **any apples**?

We use **many** and **few** with plural countable nouns:

- We didn't take **many pictures**.
- I have a **few things** to do.

You can use **some** and **any** with uncountable nouns:

- We listened to **some music**.
- Did you buy **any apple juice**?

We use **much** and **little** with uncountable nouns:

- We didn't do **much shopping**.
- I have a **little work** to do.

# Exercises

**69.1** Some of these sentences need **a/an**. Correct the sentences where necessary.

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| 1 Joe goes everywhere by bike. He hasn't got car.         | He hasn't got a car. |
| 2 Helen was listening to music when I arrived.            | OK                   |
| 3 We went to very nice restaurant last weekend.           |                      |
| 4 I brush my teeth with toothpaste.                       |                      |
| 5 I use toothbrush to brush my teeth.                     |                      |
| 6 Can you tell me if there's bank near here?              |                      |
| 7 My brother works for insurance company in Frankfurt.    |                      |
| 8 I don't like violence.                                  |                      |
| 9 Can you smell paint?                                    |                      |
| 10 When we were in Rome, we stayed in big hotel.          |                      |
| 11 We need petrol. I hope we come to petrol station soon. |                      |
| 12 I wonder if you can help me. I have problem.           |                      |
| 13 I like your suggestion. It's very interesting idea.    |                      |
| 14 John has interview for job tomorrow.                   |                      |
| 15 I like volleyball. It's good game.                     |                      |
| 16 Lisa doesn't usually wear jewellery.                   |                      |
| 17 Jane was wearing beautiful necklace.                   |                      |

**69.2** Complete the sentences using the following words. Use **a/an** where necessary.

<del>accident</del>	biscuit	blood	coat	decision	electricity
interview	key	moment	<del>music</del>	question	sugar

- It wasn't your fault. It was an accident.
- Listen! Can you hear music ?
- I couldn't get into the house because I didn't have .....
- It's very warm today. Why are you wearing ..... ?
- Do you take ..... in your coffee?
- Are you hungry? Would you like ..... with your coffee?
- Our lives would be very difficult without .....
- 'I had ..... for a job yesterday.' 'Did you? How did it go?'
- The heart pumps ..... through the body.
- Excuse me, but can I ask you ..... ?
- I'm not ready yet. Can you wait ....., please?
- We can't delay much longer. We have to make ..... soon.

**69.3** Complete the sentences using the following words. Sometimes the word needs to be plural (-s), and sometimes you need to use **a/an**.

air	day	friend	joke	language	meat
patience	people	<del>picture</del>	queue	space	umbrella

- I had my camera, but I didn't take any pictures.
- There are seven ..... in a week.
- A vegetarian is a person who doesn't eat .....
- Outside the cinema there was ..... of people waiting to see the film.
- I'm not very good at telling .....
- Last night I went out with some ..... of mine.
- There were very few ..... in town today. The streets were almost empty.
- I'm going out for a walk. I need some fresh .....
- Gary always wants things quickly. He doesn't have much .....
- I think it's going to rain. Do you have ..... I could borrow?
- Do you speak any foreign ..... ?
- Our flat is very small. We don't have much .....

A

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

*Countable*

- Did you hear **a noise** just now? (= a specific 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's **a spare room**. (= a room in a house)
- I had some interesting **experiences** while I was travelling. (= things that happened to me)
- Enjoy your trip. Have **a good time**!

*Uncountable*

- I can't work here. There's too much **noise**. (= noise in general)
- I need **some paper** to write on. (= material for writing on)
- You've got very long **hair**. (*not* 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**. (*not* experiences)
- I can't wait. I don't have **time**.

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

- I don't like **coffee** very much.

But you can say **a coffee** (= a cup of coffee), **two coffees** (= two cups) etc. :

- Two coffees** and **an orange juice**, please.

B

The following nouns are usually uncountable:

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

You cannot use **a/an** with these nouns:

- 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)

These nouns are not usually plural (so we do not say 'breads', 'furnitures' etc.):

- Where are you going to put all your **furniture**? (*not* furnitures)
- Let me know if you need more **information**. (*not* informations)

**News** is uncountable, not plural:

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

**Travel** (*noun*) means 'travelling in general' (uncountable). We do not say 'a travel' to mean **a trip** or **a journey**:

- They spend a lot of money on **travel**.
- We had a very good **trip/journey**. (*not* a good travel)

Compare these countable and uncountable nouns:

*Countable*

- 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.
- That's **a good suggestion**.

*Uncountable*

- I'm looking for **work**. (*not* a work)
- What beautiful **scenery**!
- It's nice **weather** today.
- We had a lot of **baggage/luggage**.
- This furniture** is mine.
- That's good **advice**.

## Exercises

**70.1** 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 print some documents, but the printer is out of paper / papers.
- 3 a Light / A light comes from the sun.  
b I thought there was somebody in the house because there was light / a light on inside.
- 4 a I was in a hurry this morning. I didn't have time / a time for breakfast.  
b 'Did you have a good holiday?' 'Yes, we had wonderful time / a wonderful time.'
- 5 This is nice room / a nice room. Did you decorate it yourself?
- 6 Sue was very helpful. She gave us some very useful advice / advices.
- 7 Did you have nice weather / a nice weather when you were away?
- 8 We were very unfortunate. We had bad luck / a bad luck.
- 9 Is it difficult to find a work / job at the moment?
- 10 Our travel / journey from Paris to Moscow by train was very tiring.
- 11 When the fire alarm rang, there was total chaos / a total chaos.
- 12 I had to buy a bread / some bread because I wanted to make some sandwiches.
- 13 Bad news don't / doesn't make people happy.
- 14 Your hair is / Your hairs are too long. You should have it / them cut.
- 15 The damage / The damages caused by the storm will cost a lot to repair.

**70.2** Complete the sentences using the following words. Use the plural (-s) where necessary.

advice	chair	experience	experience	furniture	hair
information	job	<del>luggage</del>	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 Mike is unemployed. He can't get a .....
- 8 Mike is unemployed. He can't get .....
- 9 If you want to leave early, you have to ask for .....
- 10 I didn't know what to do. So I asked Chris for .....
- 11 I don't think Dan should get the job. He doesn't have enough .....
- 12 Nicola has done many interesting things. She could write a book about her .....

**70.3** What do you say in these situations? Use a word from Section B (**luggage, weather** etc.) in each sentence.

- 1 Your friends have just arrived at the station. You can't see any cases or bags.  
You ask them: Do you have 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. You want your teacher to advise you about which courses to do.  
You say: Can you give me .....
- 4 You want to watch the news on TV, but you don't know when it is on.  
You ask your friend: What time .....
- 5 You are at the top of a mountain. You can see a very long way. It's beautiful.  
You say: It ....., isn't it?
- 6 You look out of the window. The weather is horrible: cold, wet and windy.  
You say: What .....