Countable and uncountable nouns

Introduction

Nouns are countable or uncountable.

Uses

Countable nouns

Most English nouns are countable and have singular and plural forms. We can count countable nouns:

One car	**One man**	**One person**	**One child**
Two cars	**Three men**	**Four people**	**Five children**

Uncountable nouns

We cannot count uncountable nouns and they cannot usually be plural.

~~One~~ water	**luggage**	**information**	**metal**	**rice**	**work**
~~Two~~ waters	**salt**	**coffee**	**money**	**music**	**hair**

Categories of uncountable nouns:

Category	Examples
Abstract	**happiness, health, love, fun, help, peace, progress, beauty, knowledge, intelligence, luck, music, time, space, energy, news**
Language and nationality	**English, French, Spanish, Turkish, grammar, slang, vocabulary**
Food	**bread, butter, chicken, beef, meat, pork, cheese, fish**

Sport and leisure	**dance, football, golf, basketball, Monopoly, chess, bridge**
Academic subjects and professions	**geography, chemistry, engineering, mathematics, politics, law, music**
Gas	**gas, air, oxygen, smoke, smog, pollution, steam, exhaust**
Liquid	**water, coffee, tea, milk, wine, soup, blood, beer**
Mass nouns	**clothes, luggage, money, homework, furniture, fruit, rubbish, traffic, trousers, jeans, shorts, scissors**
Nature	**weather, rain, snow, thunder, fire, electricity, sunshine, heat**
Material	**chalk, silver, cement, wood, cloth, glue, wool, metal**
Particles	**corn, rice, dust, flour, sugar, salt, pepper, dirt, wheat, popcorn**

However, we sometimes use uncountable nouns for food and drink with numbers and in a plural form:

France is famous for its cheeses = different kinds of cheese

Can I have two coffees and one tea, please? = two cups of coffee and one cup of tea

And can I have two sugars in the tea? = two spoonfuls of sugar

Hawaii is famous for its fishes. = types of fish

How to use numbers with uncountable nouns

Uncountable nouns cannot generally have an 's' at the end to indicate plurals so there are special ways to indicate numbers with these nouns.

We use a prepositional phrase with 'of'. For example:

I saw six drops of rain running down the window pane.

I bought two bags of sugar.

We ordered three pieces of equipment.

Another way to do this is to use the uncountable noun as an adjective before a countable noun. For example:

The PC was delivered with seven software applications already installed.

Exception

Note that some nouns can be either countable or uncountable depending on the meaning:

Countable	Uncountable
I've been to Italy three times. [on three occasions]	**I don't have enough time to finish the report. [time generally]**
There are a lot of lights in my office. [individual lights]	**There's a lot of light in my office. [from the sun or from lights]**
My house has six rooms.	**There isn't a lot of room in the kitchen. [room = space; the kitchen is very small.]**
The farm has a barn full of chickens. [whole birds]	**I would like chicken for lunch. [the meat]**
There's a hair in my food! [a single strand of hair]	**She has long, black hair.**
We had some great experiences on holiday. [things that happened]	**She has a lot of experience in sales. [knowledge and practice]**

I hear noises outside my window. [some different noises]	**There is a lot of noise in my office. [general noise]**



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