

Being able to use the vocabulary in this unit well will help you avoid repetition in your writing.

A Countable or uncountable nouns

Fact is a countable noun and evidence is uncountable – you can refer to one piece of evidence or to the body of evidence [large amount of evidence].

Some people consider data as a plural noun – *these data show an unexpected trend* – while others consider it as uncountable – *this data differs from last year's. This is a particularly interesting piece/item of data*. The tendency is increasingly to use data as an uncountable noun but you will see both forms and may use it whichever way you prefer yourself.

B Words often used with facts, evidence and data

Researchers try to establish the facts. They hope that the facts will bear out¹ or support their hypothesis. Most carefully check their facts before presenting them to others although there are, of course, dishonest people prepared to distort² the facts in order to claim that their facts are interesting, relevant³, undeniable or little-known.

¹ confirm ² change ³ connected to the topic being discussed

Notice how *fact* is also often used in sentences like the following:

It is hard to account for the fact that⁴ share prices rose over this period.

The problem stems from the fact that⁵ there is a basic conflict of interests.

The lecturer drew attention to the fact that⁶ the economy was starting to improve.

⁴ explain why ⁵ has arisen because ⁶ emphasised that

Researchers may look for, collect, examine and consider evidence. The evidence they collect may point to or suggest a conclusion. If the evidence is growing or widespread it may serve to support a theory. In writing up their research they aim to provide or offer sufficient evidence to support their theories. They are happy if the evidence they find is convincing or powerful and are less happy if the evidence is flimsy⁷ or conflicting⁸. They are pleased if new evidence comes to light⁹ or emerges and if they find abundant¹⁰ evidence. They may talk about finding hard evidence¹¹.

⁷ not strong ⁸ contradictory ⁹ becomes known, see Unit 9 ¹⁰ plenty of ¹¹ evidence which is reliable and can be proven, used mainly in spoken English

	reliable ¹² .		obtain		suggests	
	comprehensive ¹³ .		organise		reflects	
The data is	accurate.	You	analyse	data.	Data	indicates something.
	empirical ¹⁴ .		interpret			shows
			record			demonstrates

¹² can be trusted ¹³ full, complete ¹⁴ based on observation rather than theory

C Giving examples

You often need to give or provide an example to illustrate the facts you're presenting. A good example can be described as striking, clear, vivid, illuminating or telling. Sometimes, particularly in written English, the word instance is used as an alternative to example. *There is a striking instance of the author's use of metaphor in the final poem. We shall now analyse one specific instance of this problem.* Say can be used in informal English instead of for example. *Try and finish writing the report by, say, next Friday.*

TIP

There are many verbs in English which can be spelt either -ise/-yse or -ize/-yze depending on whether the writer is using British English or American English spelling. See Reference 4.

Exercises

- 24.1** Fill the gaps in this extract from a university seminar on forest conservation. Some students are questioning aspects of a presentation given by Sandra, one of the group. The first letter of each missing word is given to help you.

Aidan: I enjoyed your presentation, and you've e..... some interesting facts about the loss of forests year on year, and it's u..... that tropical forests are in danger. But I think the evidence you o..... for your claim that sustainable forest exploitation is failing is very f..... and not very c..... at all. We need to c..... a lot more data. Right now there's a lot of c..... evidence, so we can't say for certain that it's not working.

Sandra: If you want h..... evidence, just look at the International Tropical Timber Organisation, and read their latest report. Their evidence d..... that only three per cent of tropical forests are being managed properly.

Petra: Well, I've read the ITTO report, and actually it d..... attention to the fact that their previous report had found only *one* per cent of forests were properly managed, so you may be d..... the facts a little by just looking at one year. And also, there's a lot of l.....-k..... work being done with local people to encourage them to conserve the forests, so you could say there's g..... evidence that things are getting *better*.

Dr Li: Hmm, I don't think we're going to agree on this. I think, as usual, it's a question of how you i..... the data. Thanks, anyway, for your presentation, Sandra.

- 24.2** The sentences below are correct. Vary them by substituting the words in bold for words or expressions with similar meanings.

- 1 The data show that the drug education project has been successful.
- 2 The data in the latest study are more **complete** than in the earlier one.
- 3 This is the most interesting piece of data in the whole thesis.
- 4 What a clear example this is of the power of the human mind!
- 5 Unfortunately, the facts do not **bear out** the hypothesis.
- 6 We cannot **explain** the fact that attitudes are more negative now than five years ago.
- 7 The problem arises from the fact that the software was poorly designed.
- 8 The article gives examples of different methods which have been used over the years.
- 9 New evidence has emerged that the cabinet was not informed of the Minister's decision.
- 10 We need to **examine** the evidence before we can reach a conclusion.
- 11 The evidence suggesting that sanctions do not work is plentiful and very strong.
- 12 A considerable amount of evidence now exists, but we always try to get more.
- 13 We have a lot of observed data which suggest the problem is on the increase.
- 14 This is a clear example of how conservation can benefit local people.

- 24.3** One word in each sentence does not fit the sentence. Which is it?

- 1 Thorsen's aim was to *establish / check / bear out / present* the facts.
- 2 The evidence *suggests / points to / supports / emerges* a different conclusion.
- 3 Lopez *collected / reflected / obtained / recorded* some fascinating data.
- 4 The writer provides some *growing / telling / striking / illuminating* examples.
- 5 The evidence Mistry presents is *convincing / flimsy / vivid / conflicting*.

FOLLOW UP

Look at any text from your discipline and see what words are used with *facts*, *data* and *evidence*. Are they the same as the ones in this unit? Note any different ones.