

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.

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|---------|--------|------------------|----------|-------------|
| accident | biscuit | blood | coat | decision | electricity |
| interview | key | moment | music | 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 | picture | 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

Countable and uncountable 2

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 | 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 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