Nouns and adjectives

Nouns
Countable and uncountable

- The two biggest groups of nouns are COUNTABLE nouns (or COUNT nouns) and UNCOUNTABLE nouns (also called UNCOUNT nouns or MASS nouns). Most countable nouns are words for separate things that can be counted, like **apples**, **books** or **teachers**. Uncountable nouns are usually words for things that are thought of as a quantity or mass, like **water** or **time**.

  However, there are some nouns in English that you might expect to be countable but which are not. For example, **furniture**, **information** and **equipment** are all uncountable nouns in English, although they are countable in some other languages.

Countable nouns [C]

- A countable noun has a singular form and a plural form. When it is singular, it must always have a DETERMINER (a word such as **a**, **the**, **both**, **each**) in front of it. In the plural it can be used with or without a determiner:
  - *I'm having **a** driving **lesson** this afternoon.*
  - *I've had **several lessons** already.*
  - ***Lessons** cost £25 an hour.*

  Countable nouns are the most common type of noun. If they have only one meaning, or if all the meanings are countable, they are just marked *noun*. For nouns that have a number of meanings, some of which are not countable, each meaning that is countable is marked [C].

Uncountable nouns [U]

- An uncountable noun has only one form, not a separate singular and plural. It can be used with or without a determiner:
  - *Can we make **space** for an extra chair?*
  - *There isn't **much space** in this room.*

  If an uncountable noun is the subject of a verb, the verb is singular:

  - *Extra money **has been found** for this project.*

  With nouns such as **furniture**, **information** and **equipment**, as with many other uncountable nouns, you can talk about amounts of the thing or separate parts of the thing by using phrases like **a piece of**, **three items of**, **some bits of**. Nouns like **piece**, **item** and **bit** are called PARTITIVES when used in this way:

- *I picked up **some information** that might interest you.*
- *I picked up **two pieces of information** that might interest you.*

Plural nouns [pl.]

- Some nouns are always plural and have no singular form. Nouns that refer to things that have two parts joined together, for example **glasses**, **jeans** and **scissors**, are often plural nouns. You can usually also talk about **a pair of jeans**, **a pair of scissors**, etc.
  - *I'm going to buy **some new jeans**.*
  - *I'm going to buy **a** new **pair of jeans**.*

  An example is given in the entry for the noun to show that it can be used in this way.

- Some plural nouns, such as **police** and **cattle**, look as if they are singular. Nouns like this usually refer to a group of people or animals of a particular type, when they are considered together as one unit. They also take a plural verb:
  - ***Police are searching** for a man who escaped from Pentonville prison today.*
  - *The **cattle are fed** on barley and grass.*

Singular nouns [sing.]

- Some nouns are always singular and have no plural form. Many nouns like this can be used in only a limited number of ways. For example, some singular nouns must be or are often used with a particular determiner in front of them or with a particular preposition after them. The correct determiner or preposition is shown before the definition. In the case of **fillip** the pattern given is **a ~ (to/for sth)**:

fil·lip /ˈfɪlɪp/ *noun* [sing.] **a ~**(**to**/**for sth**) (*formal*) a thing or person that causes sth to improve suddenly 〈SYN〉 **boost**: *A drop in interest rates gave a welcome fillip to the housing market.*

Nouns with singular or plural verbs
[sing.+ sing./pl. v.] [C + sing./pl. v.] [U + sing./pl. v.]

- In British English some singular nouns (or countable nouns in their singular form) can be used with a plural verb as well as a singular one. Nouns like this usually refer to a group of people, an organization or a place, and can be thought of either as the organization, place or group (singular) or as many individual people (plural). In the dictionary an example is usually given to show agreement with a singular and a plural verb:

- *The **Vatican has/have** issued a further statement this morning.*
- *The **committee has/have** decided to dismiss him.*

These nouns are marked [sing. + sing./pl. v.] if they are always singular in form, and [C + sing./pl. v.] if they also have a plural form. The plural form always agrees with a plural verb.

NOTE In American English the singular form of these nouns must take a singular verb:

- *The government **says it is** committed to tax reform.*

■ Some uncountable nouns can be used with a plural verb as well as a singular one. These include some nouns that end in **-s** and therefore look as though they are plural:

- *His **whereabouts are/is** still unknown.*

and some nouns that refer to a group of people or things and can be thought of either as a group (singular) or as many individual people or things (plural):

- ***Head office** (= the people in head office) **is/are** considering the proposal*

Patterns with nouns

■ Many nouns are followed by a particular preposition, adverb or other pattern:

- *My comments were taken as an allegation of negligence.*

The correct pattern to use is shown in **bold type**, either before the definition or before an individual example. Where any part of a pattern is optional, it is given in brackets.

al·le·ga·tion ℃+ **C1** /ˌæləˈɡeɪʃn/ *noun* a public statement that is made without giving proof, accusing sb of doing sth that is wrong or illegal **SYN** accusation: *to investigate/ deny/withdraw an allegation* ◇ **~ of sth** *Several newspapers made allegations of corruption in the city's police department.* ◇ **~(of sth) against sb** *allegations of dishonesty against him* ◇ **~about sb/sth** *The committee has made serious allegations about interference in its work.* ◇ **~that …** *an allegation that he had been dishonest* ➔ **SYNONYMS** at CLAIM

The example sentences show the patterns in use.

Adjectives

■ Many adjectives can be used both before a noun:

- *a serious expression*
- *grey hair*

and after a LINKING VERB:

- *She looked serious.*
- *His hair had turned grey.*

■ However, some adjectives, or particular meanings of adjectives, are always used before a noun, and cannot be used after a linking verb. They are called ATTRIBUTIVE adjectives:

- *the chief reason*

■ Others are only used after a linking verb. They are called PREDICATIVE adjectives:

- *The baby is awake.*

→ For more information about LINKING VERBS, look at page R5.

[only before noun] [usually before noun]

■ Attributive adjectives are labelled [only before noun]. The label [usually before noun] is used when it is rare but possible to use the adjective after a verb.

Senses **1** and **3** can only be used before a noun.

con·tin·en·tal /ˌkɒntɪˈnentl; *NAmE* ˌkɑːn-/ *adj., noun*
■ *adj.* **1** (*also* **Continental**) [only before noun] (*BrE*) of or in the continent of Europe, not including Britain and Ireland: *a popular continental holiday resort* ◇ *Britain's continental neighbours* **2** (*BrE*) following the customs of countries in western and southern Europe: *a continental lifestyle* ◇ *The shutters and the balconies make the street look almost continental.* **3** [only before noun] connected with the main part of the North American continent: *Prices are often higher in Hawaii than in the continental United States.*

Sense **2** has no grammar label because it can be used both before a noun and after a linking verb.

[not before noun] [not usually before noun]

■ Predicative adjectives, labelled [not before noun], are used only after a linking verb, never before a noun. The label [not usually before noun] is used when it is rare but possible to use the adjective before a noun.

The grammar label straight after the adj. label shows that both meanings must be used after a linking verb.

rife /raɪf/ *adj.* [not before noun] **1** if sth bad or unpleasant is **rife** in a place, it is very common there **SYN** widespread: *It is a country where corruption is rife.* ◇ *Rumours are rife that he is going to resign.* **2** **~(with sth)** full of sth bad or unpleasant: *Los Angeles is rife with gossip about the stars' private lives.*

[after noun]

■ A few adjectives always follow the noun they describe. This is shown in the dictionary by the label [after noun]:

gal·ore /ɡəˈlɔː(r)/ *adj.* [after noun] (*informal*) in large quantities: *There will be games and prizes galore.*