# Nouns

## Overview: Proper Nouns and Common Nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proper Nouns</th>
<th>Common Nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Cambodia, “Over the Rainbow,”  
_of Mice and Men_, Cornell University  
Tuesday, January 17th, British, Farsi,  
Buddhism, the President of Egypt | a house, some equipment, the president,  
things (concrete)  
accounting, confusion, dreams, Christmas,  
information, language, thoughts (abstract) |

- **Proper nouns** are names of specific people, places, or things. Proper nouns always begin with capital letters. (Titles use capitals for all longer words. Short words like *and, of,* and *the* are not usually capitalized unless they are the first word of a title or name.)

- Proper nouns are usually singular and take singular verbs. This includes titles, names of organizations, and proper nouns ending in *-s.*

  _Of Mice and Men_ is a novel by John Steinbeck.

  _The United Nations_ is voting on proposed resolutions.

- All other nouns are **common nouns.** These also refer to people, places, or things, but not to specific names. Common nouns may be concrete (e.g., *house, equipment*) or they may be abstract (e.g., *confusion, thoughts*). Common nouns can be count or noncount.
### Count Nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular Count Nouns</th>
<th>Plural Count Nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>one job, one key, one party</td>
<td>two jobs, three keys, five parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an audience, a committee, a jury (<em>collective</em>)</td>
<td>audiences, committees, juries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a child, a person, a tooth, a woman</td>
<td>children, people, teeth, women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(irregular plural)</td>
<td>(same plural)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an aircraft, a deer, a fish</td>
<td>aircraft, deer, fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>jeans, savings, troops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(always plural)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Count nouns** refer to things that can be counted individually. (They can be used with numbers.) Count nouns have both a singular and plural form.

- **Singular count nouns** are used with third-person singular verbs and pronouns. They always occur with *a / an / the* or other determiners (words that come before nouns such as *my, this, each*).

  A party is fun when you know the guests, but it can be boring when you don’t.

- Some singular nouns are called **collective nouns**. They refer to groups of people or animals. Since collective nouns are countable, they have plural forms. Singular collective nouns are usually used with third-person singular verbs but take both singular and plural pronouns. One notable exception is police, which takes a plural verb.

  The committee is meeting next Tuesday. I don’t know when it’ll/they’ll meet again.

  The police help the community in many important ways.

- **Plural count nouns** usually end in -*s* or -*es*. They are used with plural verbs and pronouns. Plural count nouns can occur with *the*, with other determiners (e.g. *my, these, some*), or alone.

  Parties are uncomfortable experiences for some people, but they can be fun for others.

- Some count nouns have irregular plural forms. Others have the same form for both singular and plural, or have only a plural form.

  For regular plural nouns, see 6.3.
  For irregular plural nouns, see 6.4.
  For collective nouns, see 6.5.
## Noncount Nouns

Here are some common noncount nouns and their categories.

*Abstract nouns:* advice, beauty, crime, fun, hate

*Solids, such as food or materials:* cheese, fruit, pasta, cotton, wool

*Liquids:* blood, cream, honey, milk, oil

*Gases:* air, oxygen, smoke, steam

*Grains and powders:* cereal, detergent, dust, flour, rice

*Natural phenomena:* electricity, gravity, humidity, weather

*Areas of study:* biology, dentistry, education, engineering, mathematics

*Activities:* camping, chess, football, gymnastics, reading

*General categories:* candy, clothing, education, equipment, food

- **Noncount nouns** cannot be counted individually or used with numbers. Noncount nouns don't have plural forms. They are used with third-person singular verbs and are replaced by the pronoun *it*.

- Some noncount nouns end in -s (e.g., news, gymnastics, politics). They are singular and still take third-person singular verbs.

- Noncount nouns can occur with *the*, with determiners (e.g., *my, this, some*), or alone.

  - *The news* is disappointing.
  - Do you have *insurance* for your *jewelry*?
  - *Pollution* is a major problem in urban areas, but it has been reduced in many cities.

  > For more noncount nouns, see 6.6.

## Nouns Used with Both Count and Noncount Meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count Meaning</th>
<th>Noncount Meaning</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A crime was committed on my street.</td>
<td>Many people never think seriously about crime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why did I eat all those chocolates?</td>
<td>I don’t like chocolate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My citizenship papers arrived today!</td>
<td>More people use recycled paper these days.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Many nouns have both count and noncount meanings. The count meaning of a noun typically refers to a particular example. The noncount meaning of a noun typically refers to something in general.
### Making Noncount Nouns Countable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expressions + of</th>
<th>Containers + of</th>
<th>Measurements + of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a piece of advice</td>
<td>a glass of water</td>
<td>three feet of silk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the sheet of paper</td>
<td>the can of soda</td>
<td>two liters of orange juice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a little bit of honey</td>
<td>a box of detergent</td>
<td>four teaspoons of oregano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the cloud of smoke</td>
<td>the bag of popcorn</td>
<td>a gallon of milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two kinds of ice</td>
<td>a pack of chewing gum</td>
<td>an ounce of perfume</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- You can talk about specific quantities of noncount nouns by using expressions with *of*. Many of these expressions use container or measurement words.
- If the expression is singular, then it is usually used with a third-person singular verb. If it is plural, it is usually used with a plural verb.
  - The cloud of smoke was slowly drifting north.
  - Two kinds of ice are found on Mars.
- These expressions can be followed by *the* or by determiners (e.g., *my, this, some*), or they may come directly before the noncount noun.
  - a bit of the chocolate
  - pieces of paper
  - an item of your dry cleaning
- In addition to being used with noncount nouns, some phrases with *of* can be used with plural count nouns when the nouns refer to groups of things.
  - two kinds of nuts
  - a pile of papers

*For expressions with *of* for measuring and counting nouns, see 6.7.*