

PARAGRAPHS

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TIPS-O-MATIC

COUNT AND NON-COUNT NOUNS



Select from the following



What are COUNT NOUNS?

Look around the room or the classroom you're sitting in — the more "stuff" in the room, the better. Name some things that somebody must have carried into the room.

desks, chairs, flag, clock, computers, keyboards, projector, books, bookcases, pens, notebooks, backpacks, lights, students (Well, maybe the students walked in under their own power!)

Now name some things that are part of the room itself.

floor, wall, ceiling, windows, door, chalkboard

You can imagine there being more than one of everything you've named so far — although you might have to have more than one room to have more than one floor or ceiling. These are all **COUNT NOUNS**, things that you can count.

Usage Notes:

- Count nouns can be pluralized when appropriate. See the section on [Plurals](#) for help with the proper formation of noun plurals.
- We can use expressions such as
 - a. many bottles
 - b. few bottles
 - c. a few bottles
- These nouns, both singular and plural, can be preceded by the appropriate [definite and indefinite articles](#) — *the* with both singular and plural, *a* or *an* with singular count-nouns.
- Singular count nouns can be preceded by *this* and *that* and by *every*, *each*, *either*, and *neither*.
- Plural count nouns can be preceded by *these* and *those* and by *some*, *any*, *enough*, and the *zero article*. The phrase *number of* is accompanied by count nouns.

- Count nouns cannot be preceded by *much*. The phrase *amount of* is also a sure sign that you are *not* dealing with a count noun.



What are MASS (NON-COUNT) NOUNS?

Here is a list of **MASS NOUNS** for you to consider. Can you count any of these things? Do we use the plural form of any of these words in common speech and writing? What do the things in the first column have in common? the second column? In the first section, above, we named things in the classroom that we could count. What are some things in the same room that we can't count?


wood	water	reading	Chinese
cloth	milk	boating	Spanish
ice	wine	smoking	English
plastic	beer	dancing	luggage
wool	cake	soccer	equipment
steel	sugar	hockey	furniture
aluminum	rice	weather	experience
metal	meat	heat	applause
glass	cheese	sunshine	photography
leather	flour	electricity	traffic
porcelain		biology	harm
hair		history	publicity
dust		mathematics	homework
air		economics	advice
oxygen		poetry	

Usage Notes:

- Are there categories of things in the third and fourth columns as well? Click [HERE](#) for categories we see.
- Generally, these nouns cannot be pluralized. The non-count nouns of the second column (foodstuff) are pluralized when we use the word to express a "type":
 - There are new wines being introduced every day.
 - The waters of the Atlantic are much warmer this time of year.
 - The Dutch are famous for their cheeses.
 - The spring rains came early.
- We can use expressions such as
 - much harm
 - little harm
 - a little harm
- It is appropriate to precede these nouns with a definite or indefinite article.
 - the sunshine
 - an experience
 - a wine

But they frequently appear with zero article:

- d. Smoking is bad for you.
 - e. Poetry is beautiful.
 - f. Sugar is sweet.
 - g. Experience is the best teacher.
- These nouns can be preceded by *some, any, enough, this, that,* and *much*.
 - Because they are not countable, these nouns cannot be preceded by *these, those, every, each, either,* and *neither*.



What are ABSTRACT NOUNS?

Here is a list of **ABSTRACT NOUNS** for you to think about. Can you touch or see any of these things in the physical sense? Can you count any of them? Can you create sentences in which some of these words can be used as *plurals*?

peace	conduct	speed	taste
warmth	courage	experience	evil
hospitality	leisure	time	liberty
information	knowledge	friendship	democracy
anger	safety	trouble	death
education	shopping	work	grief
melancholy	justice	culture	piety
softness	chaos	virtue	
violence	progress		

Usage Notes:

- Because they refer to ideas, concepts, it is difficult to see how abstract nouns can be pluralized. In fact, many of them cannot be. The abstract nouns in the first two columns (above) cannot be pluralized; the abstract nouns in the second two columns can be. The section below discusses what happens to an abstract noun when it is pluralized.
 - a. The griefs of the nation are too much to bear.
 - b. The editors took liberties with our prose.
 - c. She formed many friendships at college.
- In terms of quantifiers and words that precede these words, what we say about the non-count nouns, above, can be said about abstract nouns.



How can something be BOTH a COUNT NOUN and a MASS NOUN?

If we conceive of the meaning of a noun as a continuum from being specific to being general and abstract, we can see how it can move from being a count noun to a mass noun. Consider, for example, the noun *experiences*. When I say

I had many horrifying experiences as a pilot.

I'm referring to specific, countable moments in my life as a pilot. When I say,

This position requires experience.

I'm using the word in an abstract way; it is not something you can count; it's more like an idea, a general thing that people need to have in order to apply for this job.

If I write

The talks will take place in Degnan Hall.

these talks are countable events or lectures. If I say

I hate it when a meeting is nothing but talk.

the word *talk* is now uncountable; I'm referring to the general, abstract idea of idle chatter. Evils refers to specific sins — pride, envy, sloth, and everyone's favorite, gluttony — whereas evil refers to a general notion of being bad or ungodly.

One more example: "I love the works of Beethoven" means that I like his symphonies, his string quartets, his concerti and sonatas, his choral pieces — all very countable things, *works*. "I hate work" means that I find the very idea of labor, in a general way, quite unappealing. Notice that the plural form means something quite different from the singular form of this word; they're obviously related, but they're different. What is the relationship between *plastic* and *plastics*, *wood* and *woods*, *ice* and [Italian] *ices*, *hair* and *hairs*?

Further, as noted earlier, almost all mass nouns can become count nouns when they are used in a classificatory sense:

- a. They served some nice Brazilian wines.

- b. There were some real beauties in that rose garden.
- c. We had some serious difficulties in this project.

But some things cannot be made countable or plural:
we *cannot* have furnitures, informations, knowledges, softnesses, or
chaoses. When in doubt, consult a good dictionary.

 [More on Count and Non-Count Nouns](#)

 [Nouns](#)



Choosing Quantifiers



Identifying Count and Non-Count Nouns



Categorizing Nouns: A Crossword Puzzle



Categorizing Nouns: A Crossword Puzzle

The following quiz has more to do with the spelling of irregular [Plurals](#) than with the recognition of non-count nouns, but you can try it now or after you've reviewed the section on plurals.



Plurals and Count/Non-Count Nouns



[Guide to Grammar
and Writing](#)



[Principles of
Composition](#)



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› [Cram Up](#) › [Grammar](#) › **Prepositions**

Prepositions

Prepositions are short words (on, in, to) that usually stand in front of nouns (sometimes also in front of gerund verbs).

Even advanced learners of English find prepositions difficult, as a 1:1 translation is usually not possible. One preposition in your native language might have several translations depending on the situation.

There are hardly any rules as to when to use which preposition. The only way to learn prepositions is looking them up in a dictionary, reading a lot in English (literature) and learning useful phrases off by heart (study tips).

The following table contains rules for some of the most frequently used prepositions in English:

Prepositions – Time

English	Usage	Example
<ul style="list-style-type: none">on	days of the week	on Monday
<ul style="list-style-type: none">in	months / seasons time of day year after a certain period of time (<i>when?</i>)	in August / in winter in the morning in 2006 in an hour
<ul style="list-style-type: none">at	for <i>night</i> for <i>weekend</i> a certain point of time (<i>when?</i>)	at night at the weekend at half past nine
<ul style="list-style-type: none">since	from a certain point of time (past till now)	since 1980
<ul style="list-style-type: none">for	over a certain period of time (past till now)	for 2 years
<ul style="list-style-type: none">ago	a certain time in the past	2 years ago
<ul style="list-style-type: none">before	earlier than a certain point of time	before 2004
<ul style="list-style-type: none">to	telling the time	ten to six (5:50)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">past	telling the time	ten past six (6:10)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">to / till / until	marking the beginning and end of a period of time	from Monday to/till Friday
<ul style="list-style-type: none">till / until	in the sense of <i>how long something is going to last</i>	He is on holiday until Friday.

English	Usage	Example
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> by 	in the sense of <i>at the latest</i> up to a certain time	I will be back by 6 o'clock. By 11 o'clock, I had read five pages.

Prepositions – Place (Position and Direction)

English	Usage	Example
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in 	room, building, street, town, country book, paper etc. car, taxi picture, world	in the kitchen, in London in the book in the car, in a taxi in the picture, in the world
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> at 	meaning <i>next to, by an object</i> for <i>table</i> for events place where you are to do something typical (watch a film, study, work)	at the door, at the station at the table at a concert, at the party at the cinema, at school, at work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> on 	attached for a place with a river being on a surface for a certain side (left, right) for a floor in a house for public transport for <i>television, radio</i>	the picture on the wall London lies on the Thames. on the table on the left on the first floor on the bus, on a plane on TV, on the radio
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> by, next to, beside 	left or right of somebody or something	Jane is standing by / next to / beside the...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> under 	on the ground, lower than (or covered by) something else	the bag is under the table
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> below 	lower than something else but above ground	the fish are below the surface
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> over 	covered by something else meaning <i>more than</i> getting to the other side (also <i>across</i>) overcoming an obstacle	put a jacket over your shirt over 16 years of age walk over the bridge climb over the wall
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> above 	higher than something else, but not directly over it	a path above the lake

English	Usage	Example
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> across 	getting to the other side (also <i>over</i>) getting to the other side	walk across the bridge swim across the lake
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> through 	something with limits on top, bottom and the sides	drive through the tunnel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to 	movement to person or building movement to a place or country for <i>bed</i>	go to the cinema go to London / Ireland go to bed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> into 	enter a room / a building	go into the kitchen / the house
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> towards 	movement in the direction of something (but not directly to it)	go 5 steps towards the house
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> onto 	movement to the top of something	jump onto the table
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> from 	in the sense of <i>where from</i>	a flower from the garden

Other important Prepositions

English	Usage	Example
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> from 	who gave it	a present from Jane
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> of 	who/what does it belong to what does it show	a page of the book the picture of a palace
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> by 	who made it	a book by Mark Twain
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> on 	walking or riding on horseback entering a public transport vehicle	on foot, on horseback get on the bus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in 	entering a car / Taxi	get in the car
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> off 	leaving a public transport vehicle	get off the train
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> out of 	leaving a car / Taxi	get out of the taxi
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> by 	rise or fall of something travelling (other than walking or horseriding)	prices have risen by 10 percent by car, by bus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> at 	for <i>age</i>	she learned Russian at 45
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> about 	for topics, meaning <i>what about</i>	we were talking about you

tense	Affirmative/Negative/Question	Use	Signal Words
<u>Simple Present</u>	A: He speaks. N: He does not speak. Q: Does he speak?	action in the present taking place once, never or several times facts actions taking place one after another action set by a timetable or schedule	always, every ..., never, normally, often, seldom, sometimes, usually if sentences type I (<i>If I talk, ...</i>)
<u>Present Progressive</u>	A: He is speaking. N: He is not speaking. Q: Is he speaking?	action taking place in the moment of speaking action taking place only for a limited period of time action arranged for the future	at the moment, just, just now, Listen!, Look!, now, right now
<u>Simple Past</u>	A: He spoke. N: He did not speak. Q: Did he speak?	action in the past taking place once, never or several times actions taking place one after another action taking place in the middle of another action	yesterday, 2 minutes ago, in 1990, the other day, last Friday if sentence type II (<i>If I talked, ...</i>)
<u>Past</u>	A: He was speaking.	action going	when,

<p><u>Progressive</u></p>	<p>N: He was not speaking. Q: Was he speaking?</p>	<p>on at a certain time in the past actions taking place at the same time action in the past that is interrupted by another action</p>	<p>while, as long as</p>
<p><u>Present Perfect Simple</u></p>	<p>A: He has spoken. N: He has not spoken. Q: Has he spoken?</p>	<p>putting emphasis on the result action that is still going on action that stopped recently finished action that has an influence on the present action that has taken place once, never or several times before the moment of speaking</p>	<p>already, ever, just, never, not yet, so far, till now, up to now</p>
<p><u>Present Perfect Progressive</u></p>	<p>A: He has been speaking. N: He has not been speaking. Q: Has he been speaking?</p>	<p>putting emphasis on the course or duration (not the result) action that recently stopped or is still going on finished action that influenced</p>	<p>all day, for 4 years, since 1993, how long?, the whole week</p>

		the present	
<u>Past Perfect Simple</u>	A: He had spoken. N: He had not spoken. Q: Had he spoken?	action taking place before a certain time in the past sometimes interchangeable with past perfect progressive putting emphasis only on the fact (not the duration)	already, just, never, not yet, once, until that day if sentence type III (<i>If I had talked, ...</i>)
<u>Past Perfect Progressive</u>	A: He had been speaking. N: He had not been speaking. Q: Had he been speaking?	action taking place before a certain time in the past sometimes interchangeable with past perfect simple putting emphasis on the duration or course of an action	for, since, the whole day, all day
<u>Future I Simple</u>	A: He will speak. N: He will not speak. Q: Will he speak?	action in the future that cannot be influenced spontaneous decision assumption with regard to the future	in a year, next ..., tomorrow If-Satz Typ I (<i>If you ask her, she will help you.</i>) <i>assumption</i> : I think, probably, perhaps

<u>Future I Simple</u> (going to)	A: He is going to speak. N: He is not going to speak. Q: Is he going to speak?	decision made for the future conclusion with regard to the future	in one year, next week, tomorrow
<u>Future I Progressive</u>	A: He will be speaking. N: He will not be speaking. Q: Will he be speaking?	action that is going on at a certain time in the future action that is sure to happen in the near future	in one year, next week, tomorrow
<u>Future II Simple</u>	A: He will have spoken. N: He will not have spoken. Q: Will he have spoken?	action that will be finished at a certain time in the future	by Monday, in a week
<u>Future II Progressive</u>	A: He will have been speaking. N: He will not have been speaking. Q: Will he have been speaking?	action taking place before a certain time in the future putting emphasis on the course of an action	for ..., the last couple of hours, all day long
<u>Conditional I Simple</u>	A: He would speak. N: He would not speak. Q: Would he speak?	action that might take place	if sentences type II <i>(If I were you, I would go home.)</i>
<u>Conditional I Progressive</u>	A: He would be speaking. N: He would not be speaking. Q: Would he be speaking?	action that might take place putting emphasis on the course /	

		duration of the action	
<u>Conditiona</u> <u>I II Simple</u>	A: He would have spoken. N: He would not have spoken. Q: Would he have spoken?	action that might have taken place in the past	if sentences type III (<i>If I had seen that, I would have helped.</i>)
<u>Conditiona</u> <u>I II</u> <u>Progressiv</u> <u>e</u>	A: He would have been speaking. N: He would not have been speaking. Q: Would he have been speaking?	action that might have taken place in the past puts emphasis on the course / duration of the action	

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A and AN are called indefinite articles. "Indefinite" means "not specific".

Use A(AN) when you are talking about a thing in general, NOT a specific thing.

Examples:

- I need **a** phone. *Not a specific phone, any phone*
- Mark wants **a** bicycle. *Not a particular bicycle, a bicycle in general*
- Do you have **a** driver's license? *In general*

Use A(AN) when talking about a thing which is new, unknown, or introduced to a listener for the first time. Also use A(AN) when you are asking about the existence of something.

Examples:

- I have **a** car. *The car is being introduced for the first time.*
- Tom is **a** teacher. *This is new information to the listener.*
- Is there **a** dictionary in your backpack? *Asking about the existence of the dictionary*

Similarly, use A(AN) to introduce what type of thing we are talking about.

Examples:

- That is **an** excellent book. *Describing the kind of book*
- Do you live in **a** big house? *Asking about the kind of house*
- I ate **a** thick, juicy steak. *Describing the kind of steak*

REMEMBER: You cannot use A(AN) with plural nouns because A(AN) means "one" or "a single".

Examples:

- I saw **a** bears in Yellowstone National Park. **Not Correct**
- I saw bears in Yellowstone National Park. **Correct**

USE 10

THE is called a definite article. "Definite" means "specific". Use *THE* when talking about something which is already known to the listener or which has been previously mentioned, introduced, or discussed.

Examples:

- I have a cat. **The** cat is black.
- There is a book in my backpack. **The** book is very heavy.
- Do you know where I left **the** car keys? *The listener knows which specific car keys you are talking about.*
- Do you own a car? Is **the** car blue? *You assume they do have a car after asking about it in the first sentence.*
- Nobody lives on **the** Moon. *The Moon is known to everyone.*

IMPORTANT: You can use *THE* with both singular nouns and plural nouns.

Examples:

- I saw **the** bear in Yellowstone National Park. **Correct**
- I saw **the** bears in Yellowstone National Park. **Correct**

USE 11

Many clauses and phrases make the noun known to the listener by telling the listener which person or thing we are talking about. Let's look at an example sentence:

Can you give me **the** book *on the table*.

We use *THE* in this sentence because the phrase "on the table" tells the listener which book we are referring to. We are not talking about other books, we are talking about a specific book that the listener can see or already knows about. Learning to recognize such identifying clauses and phrases will help you use *THE* correctly.

Examples:

- Did you read **the** book *which I gave you*?
- He didn't like **the** movie *that you suggested*.
- He loved **the** dessert *with chocolate and cherries*.
- **The** phone *on my desk* belongs to Ken.

- Did you know **the** man *who was talking to Leonie?*

HOWEVER: Not all clauses and phrases make the noun known to the listener. Some are simply descriptive. They add extra information, but they do not tell the listener which specific thing we are talking about.

Examples:

- He bought **the** house *with a big backyard. This combination tells the listener which specific house he bought.*
- He bought **a** house *with a big backyard. This combination tells the listener what kind of house he bought, but not the specific house he bought.*