

# 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 rice

You 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.
- 2 Helen was listening to music when I arrived.
- 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.

He hasn't got a car.

OK

**69.2** Complete the sentences using the following words. Use **a/an** where necessary.

<del>accident</del>	biscuit	blood	coat	decision	electricity
interview	key	moment	<del>music</del>	question	sugar

- 1 It wasn't your fault. It was an accident.
- 2 Listen! Can you hear music?
- 3 I couldn't get into the house because I didn't have \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4 It's very warm today. Why are you wearing \_\_\_\_\_?
- 5 Do you take \_\_\_\_\_ in your coffee?
- 6 Are you hungry? Would you like \_\_\_\_\_ with your coffee?
- 7 Our lives would be very difficult without \_\_\_\_\_.
- 8 'I had \_\_\_\_\_ for a job yesterday.' 'Did you? How did it go?'
- 9 The heart pumps \_\_\_\_\_ through the body.
- 10 Excuse me, but can I ask you \_\_\_\_\_?
- 11 I'm not ready yet. Can you wait \_\_\_\_\_, please?
- 12 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	<del>picture</del>	queue	space	umbrella

- 1 I had my camera, but I didn't take any pictures.
- 2 There are seven \_\_\_\_\_ in a week.
- 3 A vegetarian is a person who doesn't eat \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4 Outside the cinema there was \_\_\_\_\_ of people waiting to see the film.
- 5 I'm not very good at telling \_\_\_\_\_.
- 6 Last night I went out with some \_\_\_\_\_ of mine.
- 7 There were very few \_\_\_\_\_ in town today. The streets were almost empty.
- 8 I'm going out for a walk. I need some fresh \_\_\_\_\_.
- 9 Gary always wants things quickly. He doesn't have much \_\_\_\_\_.
- 10 I think it's going to rain. Do you have \_\_\_\_\_ I could borrow?
- 11 Do you speak any foreign \_\_\_\_\_?
- 12 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	<del>luggage</del>	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 \_\_\_\_\_!



Countable nouns with **a/an** and **some**

A

Countable nouns can be *singular* or *plural*:

a <b>dog</b>	a <b>child</b>	the <b>evening</b>	this <b>party</b>	an <b>umbrella</b>
<b>dogs</b>	some <b>children</b>	the <b>evenings</b>	these <b>parties</b>	two <b>umbrellas</b>

Before singular countable nouns you can use **a/an**:

- ☐ Bye! Have a nice **evening**.
- ☐ Do you need **an umbrella**?

You cannot use singular countable nouns alone (without **a/the/my** etc.):

- ☐ She never wears **a** hat. (*not* She never wears hat)
- ☐ Be careful of **the** dog. (*not* Be careful of dog)
- ☐ What **a** beautiful day!
- ☐ I've got **a** headache.

B

We use **a/an** ... to say what kind of thing something is, or what kind of person somebody is:

- ☐ That's a **nice table**.

In the plural we use the noun alone (*not* some ...):

- ☐ Those are **nice chairs**. (*not* some nice chairs)

Compare singular and plural:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A dog is <b>an animal</b> .           | <input type="checkbox"/> Dogs are <b>animals</b> .                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'm <b>an optimist</b> .              | <input type="checkbox"/> We're <b>optimists</b> .                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tom's father is <b>a doctor</b> .     | <input type="checkbox"/> Most of my friends are <b>students</b> .       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Are you <b>a good driver</b> ?        | <input type="checkbox"/> Are they <b>good students</b> ?                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jane is <b>a really nice person</b> . | <input type="checkbox"/> Jane's parents are <b>really nice people</b> . |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What <b>a lovely dress</b> !          | <input type="checkbox"/> What <b>awful shoes</b> !                      |

We say that somebody has **a long nose** / **a nice face** / **blue eyes** / **small hands** etc. :

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jack has <b>a long nose</b> .<br>( <i>not</i> the long nose) | <input type="checkbox"/> Jack has <b>blue eyes</b> .<br>( <i>not</i> the blue eyes) |
|---|---|

Remember to use **a/an** when you say what somebody's job is:

- ☐ Sandra is **a nurse**. (*not* Sandra is nurse)
- ☐ Would you like to be **an English teacher**?

C

You can use **some** with plural countable nouns. We use **some** in two ways.(1) **Some** = a number of / a few of / a pair of:

- ☐ I've seen **some** good **movies** recently. (*not* I've seen good movies)
- ☐ **Some friends** of mine are coming to stay at the weekend.
- ☐ I need **some** new **sunglasses**. (= a new pair of sunglasses)

Do not use **some** when you are talking about things in general (see Unit 75):

- ☐ I love **bananas**. (*not* some bananas)
- ☐ My aunt is a writer. She writes **books**. (*not* some books)

(2) **Some** = some but not all:

- ☐ **Some children** learn very quickly. (but not all children)
- ☐ Tomorrow there will be rain in **some places**, but most of the country will be dry.

## Exercises

**71.1** What are these things? Use a dictionary if necessary.

- |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1 an ant? <u>It's an insect.</u>         | 7 Earth, Mars, Venus and Jupiter?     |
| 2 ants and bees? <u>They're insects.</u> |                                       |
| 3 a cauliflower?                         | 8 a tulip?                            |
| 4 chess?                                 | 9 the Nile, the Rhine and the Mekong? |
| 5 a pigeon, an eagle and a crow?         |                                       |
| 6 a skyscraper?                          | 10 a violin, a trumpet and a flute?   |

Who were these people?

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 11 Beethoven? <u>He was a composer.</u> | 15 Marilyn Monroe?                  |
| 12 Shakespeare?                         |                                     |
| 13 Albert Einstein?                     | 16 Michael Jackson and John Lennon? |
|   |                                     |
| 14 Washington, Lincoln and Kennedy?     | 17 Van Gogh, Renoir and Picasso?    |

**71.2** Read about what these people do, and say what their jobs are. Choose from:

chef	interpreter	journalist	<del>nurse</del>
plumber	surgeon	tour guide	waiter

- Sarah looks after patients in hospital. She's a nurse.
- Gary works in a restaurant. He brings the food to the tables. He \_\_\_\_\_
- Jane writes articles for a newspaper. \_\_\_\_\_
- Kevin works in a hospital. He operates on people. \_\_\_\_\_
- Jonathan cooks in a restaurant. \_\_\_\_\_
- Dave installs and repairs water pipes. \_\_\_\_\_
- Martina takes visitors round her city and tells them about it. She \_\_\_\_\_
- Lisa translates what people are saying from one language into another so that they can understand each other. \_\_\_\_\_

**71.3** Put in **a/an** or **some** where necessary. If no word is necessary, leave the space empty.

- I've seen some good films recently.
- What's wrong with you? Have you got a headache?
- I know a lot of people. Most of them are - students.
- When I was \_\_\_\_\_ child, I used to be very shy.
- Would you like to be \_\_\_\_\_ actor?
- Questions, questions, questions! You're always asking \_\_\_\_\_ questions!
- What \_\_\_\_\_ beautiful garden!
- \_\_\_\_\_ birds, for example the penguin, cannot fly.
- Do you like staying in \_\_\_\_\_ hotels?
- I've been walking for three hours. I've got \_\_\_\_\_ sore feet.
- I don't feel very well this morning. I've got \_\_\_\_\_ sore throat.
- Maria speaks \_\_\_\_\_ English, but not very much.
- It's a shame we don't have \_\_\_\_\_ camera. I'd like to take \_\_\_\_\_ picture of that house.
- Those are \_\_\_\_\_ nice shoes. Where did you get them?
- I'm going shopping. I want to buy \_\_\_\_\_ new shoes.
- You need \_\_\_\_\_ visa to visit \_\_\_\_\_ countries, but not all of them.
- Jane is \_\_\_\_\_ teacher. Her parents were \_\_\_\_\_ teachers too.
- I don't believe him. He's \_\_\_\_\_ liar. He's always telling \_\_\_\_\_ lies.