

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.

- Joe goes everywhere by bike. He hasn't got car.
- Helen was listening to music when I arrived.
- We went to very nice restaurant last weekend.
- I brush my teeth with toothpaste.
- I use toothbrush to brush my teeth.
- Can you tell me if there's bank near here?
- My brother works for insurance company in Frankfurt.
- I don't like violence.
- Can you smell paint?
- When we were in Rome, we stayed in big hotel.
- We need petrol. I hope we come to petrol station soon.
- I wonder if you can help me. I have problem.
- I like your suggestion. It's very interesting idea.
- John has interview for job tomorrow.
- I like volleyball. It's good game.
- Lisa doesn't usually wear jewellery.
- 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.

~~accident~~
interview

biscuit
key

blood
moment

coat
~~music~~

decision
question

electricity
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
patience

day
people

friend
~~picture~~

joke
queue

language
space

meat
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 !

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

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

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

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:

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

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

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Jack has a long nose .
(<i>not</i> the long nose) | ☐ Jack has blue eyes .
(<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? | |
| | 10 a violin, a trumpet and a flute? |
| 6 a skyscraper? | |

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	nurse
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.

A/an and the

A

Study this example:

I had **a sandwich** and **an apple** for lunch.

The sandwich wasn't very good, but **the apple** was nice.



JOE



KAREN

Joe says '**a** sandwich', '**an** apple' because this is the first time he talks about them.

Joe now says '**the** sandwich', '**the** apple' because Karen knows which sandwich and which apple he means – **the** sandwich and **the** apple that he had for lunch.

Compare **a** and **the** in these examples:

- ☐ **A man** and **a woman** were sitting opposite me. **The man** was American, but I think **the woman** was British.
- ☐ When we were on holiday, we stayed at **a hotel**. Sometimes we ate at **the hotel** and sometimes we went to **a restaurant**.

B

We use **the** when we are thinking of a specific thing. Compare **a/an** and **the**:

- ☐ Tim sat down on **a chair**. (perhaps one of many chairs in the room)
Tim sat down on **the chair nearest the door**. (a specific chair)
- ☐ Paula is looking for **a job**. (not a specific job)
Did Paula get **the job she applied for**? (a specific job)
- ☐ Do you have **a car**? (not a specific car)
I cleaned **the car** yesterday. (= my car)

C

We use **the** when it is clear in the situation which thing or person we mean. For example, in a room we talk about **the light** / **the floor** / **the ceiling** / **the door** / **the carpet** etc. :

- ☐ Can you turn off **the light**, please? (= the light in this room)
- ☐ I took a taxi to **the station**. (= the station in that town)
- ☐ (*in a shop*) I'd like to speak to **the manager**, please. (= the manager of this shop)

In the same way, we say (go to) **the bank** / **the post office**:

- ☐ I have to go to **the bank** and then I'm going to **the post office**.
(The speaker is usually thinking of a specific bank or post office.)

We also say (go to) **the doctor** / **the dentist**:

- ☐ Clare isn't very well. She's gone to **the doctor**. (= her usual doctor)
- ☐ I don't like going to **the dentist**.

Compare **the** and **a**:

- ☐ I have to go to **the bank** today.
Is there **a bank** near here?
- ☐ I don't like going to **the dentist**.
My sister is **a dentist**.

D

We say 'once **a week** / three times **a day** / £1.50 **a kilo**' etc. :

- ☐ 'How often do you go to the cinema?' 'About once **a month**.'
- ☐ 'How much are those potatoes?' '£1.50 **a kilo**.'
- ☐ Helen works eight hours **a day**, six days **a week**.

Exercises

72.1 Put in a/an or the.

- 1 This morning I bought a newspaper and magazine. newspaper is in my bag, but I can't remember where I put magazine.
- 2 I saw accident this morning. car crashed into tree. driver of car wasn't hurt, but car was badly damaged.
- 3 There are two cars parked outside: blue one and grey one. blue one belongs to my neighbours; I don't know who owner of grey one is.
- 4 My friends live in old house in small village. There is beautiful garden behind house. I would like to have garden like that.

72.2 Put in a/an or the.

- 1 a This house is very nice. Has it got garden?
b It's a beautiful day. Let's sit in garden.
c I like living in this house, but it's a shame that garden is so small.
- 2 a Can you recommend good restaurant?
b We had dinner in very nice restaurant.
c We had dinner in best restaurant in town.
- 3 a She has French name, but in fact she's English, not French.
b What's name of that man we met yesterday?
c We stayed at a very nice hotel – I can't remember name now.
- 4 a There isn't airport near where I live. nearest airport is 70 miles away.
b Our flight was delayed. We had to wait at airport for three hours.
c Excuse me, please. Can you tell me how to get to airport?
- 5 a 'Are you going away next week?' 'No, week after next.'
b I'm going away for week in September.
c Gary has a part-time job. He works three mornings week.

72.3 Put in a/an or the where necessary.

- 1 Would you like apple?
- 2 How often do you go to dentist?
- 3 Could you close door, please?
- 4 I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do that. It was mistake.
- 5 Excuse me, where is bus station, please?
- 6 I have problem. Can you help me?
- 7 I'm just going to post office. I won't be long.
- 8 There were no chairs, so we sat on floor
- 9 Have you finished with book I lent you?
- 10 My sister has just got job in bank in Zurich.
- 11 We live in small apartment in city centre.
- 12 There's supermarket at end of street I live in.

Would you like an apple?

72.4 Answer these questions about yourself. Where possible, use the structure in Section D (once a week / three times a day etc.).

- 1 How often do you go to the cinema? Three or four times a year.
- 2 How often do you go to the cinema?
- 3 How often do you go away on holiday?
- 4 What's the usual speed limit in towns in your country?
- 5 How much sleep do you need?
- 6 How often do you go out in the evening?
- 7 How much television do you watch (on average)?
- 8 How much does it cost to rent a small car in your country?