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GRAMMAR



Countable and uncountable nouns

- **Countable nouns**
  A countable noun has a singular and a plural form. We can use a singular or plural verb with it. We can use numbers with it.
  *Where **is** my shirt?*
  *Where **are** my shirts?*
  a shirt, shirts, some shirts, four shirts

- **Uncountable nouns**
  An uncountable noun has only one form. We can only use a singular verb with it. We cannot use numbers with it.
  *Here **is** some **advice** for you.*
  advice, some advice
  However, we can count an uncountable noun indirectly by using a phrase like *a piece of, a bit of.*
  *When I left home my mother gave me **two** useful **bits of** advice.*
  *I've found out **several** interesting **pieces of** information.*
  A few uncountable nouns end in *-s*, but they follow the normal rules for uncountable nouns and have a singular verb.
  *The news **is** very bad today.*
  *Billiards **is** an interesting game.*

- **Typical uncountable nouns**
  Substances: *water, air, coffee, plastic, iron, paper*
  Abstract ideas: *life, fun, freedom, health, time, progress*
  Activities: *work, travel, sleep, football, help, research*
  Human feelings: *happiness, anger, honesty, hope, respect, courage*
  Groups of items: *furniture, luggage*
  Other words are found in the practice section. Note the words below which are uncountable in English but countable in many other languages:
  accommodation, advice, behaviour, business, cash, equipment, furniture, health, homework, information, knowledge, luggage, money, permission, rubbish, scenery, traffic, travel, weather, work

- **Uncountable nouns that describe a category**
  Some uncountable nouns can be used in a countable way when they describe a category.
  Uncountable use: *Would you like **some fruit** after your coffee?*
  Use as a category: *There are **two** main **fruits** exported from here, bananas and pineapples.*

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LANGUAGE PRACTICE FOR FIRST

- **Change of meaning**

Some words have different meanings in countable and uncountable forms.

Countable:		Uncountable:	
an iron	(domestic appliance)	*some iron*	(a substance / material)
a wood	(small area of trees)	*some wood*	(a substance / material)
a paper	(newspaper)	*some paper*	(a substance / material)
a chicken	(the animal)	*chicken*	(the meat)

There is a similar contrast between:

Item:	*a coffee* (a cup of coffee)
Material:	*coffee*

- **Other examples with a change of meaning:**

business (in general)	*a business* (a company)
gossip (talking)	*a gossip* (a person)
hair (all together)	*a hair* (a single strand)
help (in general)	*a help* (a helpful person / thing)
toast (grilled bread)	*a toast* (formal words said before drinking)
work (in general)	*a work* (a work of art / engineering)

- **Plural nouns**

These nouns only have a plural form and are used with a plural verb.

*My trousers **are** too tight.*
*The stairs **are** very steep.*

Other common examples are:

clothes, contents, feelings, goods, jeans, means, outskirts, surroundings, thanks

There are some nouns ending in *-s* which are used with a singular verb.

*The news **is** on at nine.*
*Sport is used everywhere as **a** means of keeping fit.*

- **Group nouns**

Some nouns can be followed by either a singular or plural verb.

*I think the government **is / are** wrong.*

It depends whether we think of the group as a whole (singular verb), or its individual members (plural verb). Other common examples:

army, audience, class, company, crew, crowd, data, family, group, media, press, public, staff, team

Some group nouns are only used with a plural verb: *cattle, police, people*

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1 Underline the best word to complete each sentence.

1 Different countries have different *weather* / *weathers*.
2 All areas of the skin are in fact covered in tiny *hair* / *hairs*.
3 We've looked at the menu and we'd all like *chicken* / *chickens*.
4 Jack is a millionaire and owns a lot of *business* / *businesses*.
5 Have you got a copy of the complete *work* / *works* of Dante?
6 None of the passengers had insured their *baggage* / *baggages*.
7 Students must pass their *paper* / *papers* to the front.
8 I'm afraid we can't find cheap *accommodation* / *accommodations* for all of you.

2 Complete each sentence with *a / an* or *some*, or write – if no word is needed.

1 When the play ended, there was ..... lengthy applause.
2 I can't come out tonight. I have ..... homework to do.
3 Sue received ..... excellent education.
4 The inside is strengthened with ..... steel frame.
5 My friends bought me ..... coffee maker for my birthday.
6 David has just bought ..... new furniture.
7 Let me give you ..... advice.
8 My trousers need pressing. Can you lend me ..... iron?

3 Underline the best word to complete each sentence.

1 I would love to go on a long *journey* / *travel* by train.
2 What's the latest news? Can I look at your *paper* / *journal*?
3 Here's your ticket. Do you have any *luggage* / *suitcase*?
4 Don't forget to buy a sliced *bread* / *loaf*.
5 Why don't we leave the car in this car *park* / *parking*.
6 I can't come to work today. I have a bad *cold* / *flu*.
7 Excuse me sir, but do you have a *licence* / *permission* for this gun?
8 Brighton has quite a good *beach* / *seaside*.

4 Complete each sentence with one word.

1 I'm looking for .accommodation... . Do you know anywhere I can stay?
2 Take my ..... , don't go out alone after dark.
3 The government plans to improve ..... by paying teachers more.
4 Can you lend me some ..... ? I want to print out a letter.
5 I need some ..... about language schools. Can you help me?
6 Richard is unemployed, and he is looking for a ..... .
7 Could I have some ..... ? Those apples and oranges look nice.
8 I used to have long ..... , but I had it cut.
9 I can't do this on my own. Could you give me some ..... ?
10 If you can't undo the knot, cut the string with some ..... .

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5 Choose the best word or phrase (A, B, C or D) to complete each sentence.

1 I like your new trousers. Where did you buy ..... B ..... ?
A it *B* them *C* them both *D* them all

2 There is always a very large ..... at the church I go to.
A congregation *B* audience *C* spectator *D* company

3 The local ..... has agreed to repair the road outside our house.
A government *B* people *C* council *D* jury

4 When the police arrived, we were pleased to see ..... .
A him *B* him or her *C* it *D* them

5 The car turned over, but luckily it didn't suffer serious ..... .
A damage *B* injury *C* damages *D* injuries

6 Sorry, I'm late, but I had a lot of ..... to do.
A job *B* work *C* task *D* labour

7 Julie bought herself a complete new ..... for winter.
A outfit *B* cloth *C* clothing *D* wear

8 I feel like going out tonight. Let's go to a / an ..... .
A dancing *B* night *C* club *D* entertainment

9 Thanks for a great weekend! We really had a / an ..... .
A fun *B* enjoyment *C* hospitality *D* good time

10 In order to prove Smith is guilty, we must find some ..... .
A information *B* evidence *C* knowledge *D* means

6 Choose the best meaning (a or b) for each sentence (1–10).

1 You mustn't lose heart.
a) Don't have an operation. (b) Don't give up hope.

2 Where's my glass?
a) I want a drink. b) I can't see.

3 Jack has a new post.
a) The postman has delivered a letter. b) He has a different job.

4 All goods must be paid for in advance.
a) Nothing enjoyable in life is free. b) You have to pay for these things first.

5 I've joined a new company.
a) I have a new job. b) I have some new friends.

6 This hotel has class.
a) You can study hotel management here. b) It is a good quality hotel.

7 I don't have the means to help you.
a) I'm not able to help. b) I can't understand what help you need.

8 I'd like some china.
a) I want to go abroad. b) I need some cups and plates.

9 Do you have any cash?
a) Do you need to pay by card? b) Isn't there a place to pay in this shop?

10 They have a business in Leeds.
a) They have to go there to do a job. b) They own a company there.

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7 Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. Do not change the word given. You must use between two and five words, including the word given.

1 This island has a large population. PEOPLE
There are a lot of people on this island.

2 Do you own these things? YOUR
Are ..... belongings?

3 The weather was good on our holiday. HAD
We ..... on our holiday.

4 There were a lot of cars on the road to Manchester. TRAFFIC
There ..... on the road to Manchester.

5 Gerry is a very strong person, in my opinion. STRENGTH
Gerry ..... in my opinion.

6 There are pieces of paper all over the floor! LITTER
There ..... all over the floor.

7 Can I park my car here? ALLOWED
Is ..... here?

8 I know these machines are very expensive. MACHINERY
I know ..... very expensive.

9 Could you get some bread from the supermarket? LOAF
Could you get ..... from the supermarket?

10 I know nothing about this subject. KNOWLEDGE
I haven't got ..... of this subject

11 I am looking for somewhere to stay. ACCOMMODATION
I am looking for ..... .

12 Sorry, I don't have a credit card. CASH
Sorry, I ..... .

8 Complete each sentence with one word from the box.

clap	flight	head	item	~~piece~~	set	sheet	slice

1 Let me give you a .....piece..... of advice.
2 There is an interesting ..... of news in the paper.
3 A ..... of stairs takes you to the top of the house.
4 Could I have another ..... of paper, please?
5 Helen has a lovely ..... of hair.
6 Do you want another ..... of toast?
7 We bought Mike and Lynn a ..... of cutlery for a wedding present.
8 The lightning was followed by a ..... of thunder.

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9 Decide which answer (A, B, C or D) best fits each gap.



Breakfast is one of those (1) ...B..... that varies from person to person, and country to country. For some (2) ..... it means a (3) ..... of toast and some coffee. In various places I've also been offered (4) ..... or fruit. (5) ..... executives might eat breakfast at the (6) ..... , while for many schoolchildren breakfast is a (7) ..... of milk at home, and then a long wait (8) ..... the first break of the morning, when they eat (9) ..... or (10) ..... chocolate bar. Some families sit down and eat together (11) ..... the morning, and listen to (12) ..... news on the radio or (13) ..... early morning television. For other people, the early morning is a rush (14) ..... work or school, and there simply isn't (15) ..... for breakfast.

1	*A* times	*B* meals	*C* foods	*D* plates
2	*A* people	*B* persons	*C* breakfasts	*D* us
3	*A* sheet	*B* loaf	*C* slice	*D* sandwich
4	*A* a cheese	*B* the cheese	*C* cheese	*D* cheeses
5	*A* Business	*B* A business	*C* Business's	*D* Businessmen
6	*A* train	*B* street	*C* morning	*D* office
7	*A* glass	*B* piece	*C* warm	*D* box
8	*A* to	*B* is	*C* until	*D* which
9	*A* sandwich	*B* the sandwich	*C* a sandwiches	*D* sandwiches
10	*A* a	*B* some	*C* a piece	*D* a glass of
11	*A* for	*B* in	*C* at	*D* while
12	*A* a	*B* what	*C* some	*D* the
13	*A* look	*B* watch	*C* see	*D* regard
14	*A* to	*B* from	*C* at	*D* and
15	*A* there	*B* it	*C* enough	*D* time

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10 Complete each sentence with one word from the box.

accommodation	~~bread~~	cookery	lightning	parking
advice	cash	information	luggage	spelling

1 I can't cut this loaf. Do you have a proper .....bread..... knife?
2 I'm afraid that 'neice' is a ..... mistake.
3 There's usually a / an ..... space opposite the cinema.
4 We need a / an ..... box to keep the money in.
5 The tourist board have built a / an ..... centre near the castle.
6 We decided to put a / an ..... conductor on the roof.
7 Marjorie used to write a / an ..... column in a magazine.
8 These suitcases are very heavy. We must find a / an ..... trolley.
9 I must rush. I'm going to a / an ..... lesson.
10 Julie found her flat through a / an ..... agency.

Key points

1 Check in a dictionary to be sure that a noun is countable or uncountable.
2 The meaning of a noun may change depending on whether it is used in a countable or uncountable sense.
3 Note that some nouns ending in *-s* take a singular verb:
*The news **is** bad today.*
And that some nouns only have a plural form:
*The police **are** arriving shortly.*

SEE ALSO
Grammar 18: Articles
Consolidation 5: Units 17–20

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