Countable & Uncountable Nouns

Just as the name implies, some nouns are countable (i.e. 1 chair, 2 chairs, etc.) and others are not countable. The latter refers to things that are not easily counted (like sand or sugar) or to words that refer to a group of items (like furniture or equipment). The charts below identify many uncountable nouns.

11-3 NONCOUNT NOUNS

INDIVIDUAL PARTS (Count Nouns)		THE WHOLE (Noncount Nouns)
(a)	letters, postcards, bills, etc.	*mail*
(b)	apples, bananas, oranges, etc.	*fruit*
(c)	rings, bracelets, necklaces, etc.	*jewelry*

Noncount nouns usually refer to a whole group of things that is made up of many individual parts, a whole category made up of different varieties.

For example, *furniture* is a noncount noun; it describes a whole category of things: *chairs, tables, beds, etc.*

INDIVIDUAL PARTS = THE WHOLE

chairs, tables, beds, etc. → ***furniture***

Mail, fruit, and *jewelry* are other examples of noncount nouns that refer to a whole category made up of individual parts.

SOME COMMON NONCOUNT NOUNS: WHOLE GROUPS MADE UP OF INDIVIDUAL PARTS

A. *clothing*, *equipment*, *food*, *fruit*, *furniture*, *jewelry*, *mail*, *money*, *scenery*, *stuff*, *traffic*

B. *homework*, *housework*, *work*

C. *advice*, *information*

D. *history*, *literature*, *music*, *poetry*

E. *grammar*, *slang*, *vocabulary*

F. *Arabic*, *Chinese*, *English*, *German*, *Indonesian*, *Spanish*, *Etc.*

G. *corn*, *dirt*, *flour*, *hair*, *pepper*, *rice*, *salt*, *sand*, *sugar*

11-4 MORE NONCOUNT NOUNS

(a) **LIQUIDS**

coffee, *milk*, *oil*, *soup*, *tea*, *water*

SOLIDS and SEMI-SOLIDS

bread, *butter*, *cheese*, *ice*, *meat*, *beef*, *chicken*, *fish*, *chalk*, *glass*, *gold*, *iron*, *paper*, *soap*, *toothpaste*, *wood*

GASES

air, *pollution*, *smog*, *smoke*

(b) **THINGS THAT OCCUR IN NATURE**

weather, *rain*, *snow*, *darkness*, *light*, *sunshine*, *thunder*, *lightning*

(c) **ABSTRACTIONS***

beauty, *courage*, *experience*, *fun*, *generosity*, *happiness*, *health*, *help*, *honesty*, *ignorance*, *knowledge*, *luck*, *patience*, *progress*, *time*, *violence*

LIVEWORKSHEETS

The most important thing to remember is that uncountable nouns always take a singular verb.

Another thing to know is that countable and uncountable nouns require different modifiers. For example, the articles *a* and *an* can only be used with countable nouns, which is logical because these words mean "one": a number can only be used with a countable item.

11-2 COUNT AND NONCOUNT NOUNS

	SINGULAR	PLURAL	
COUNT NOUN	***a*** chair ***one*** chair	**Ø*** chairs ***two*** chairs ***some*** chairs	A count noun: (1) can be counted with numbers: *one chair, two chairs, ten chairs, etc.* (2) can be preceded by ***a/an*** in the singular: *a chair.* (3) has a plural form ending in ***-s*** or ***-es***: *chairs.***
NONCOUNT NOUN	**Ø** furniture ***some*** furniture	**Ø** **Ø**	A noncount noun: (1) cannot be counted with numbers. *INCORRECT: one furniture* (2) is NOT immediately preceded by ***a/an***. *INCORRECT: a furniture* (3) does NOT have a plural form (no final-***s***). *INCORRECT: furnitures*

The chart below identifies more modifiers—those that can be used with countable nouns and those that can be used with uncountable nouns.

11-5 USING *SEVERAL, A LOT OF, MANY/MUCH, AND A FEW/A LITTLE*

COUNT	NONCOUNT	
(a) ***several*** chairs	**Ø**	***Several*** is used only with *count* nouns.
(b) ***a lot of*** chairs	***a lot of*** furniture	***A lot of*** is used with both *count* and *noncount* nouns.
(c) ***many*** chairs	***much*** furniture	***Many*** is used with *count* nouns. ***Much*** is used with *noncount* nouns.
(d) ***a few*** chairs	***a little*** furniture	***A few*** is used with *count* nouns. ***A little*** is used with *noncount* nouns.

Try to see the similarity with Spanish. *Several* means "varios", related to numbers, so it can only be used with countable nouns. Spanish uses *many* ("muchos") and *much* ("mucho") in the same way English uses them.

many chairs = muchas sillas
much salt = mucha sal

how many = cuantos
how much = cuanto

The same is true for *a few* and *a little*.

a few chairs = pocas silla
a little salt = un poco de sal

Let's add to this list the words *some* and *any*. Both *some* and *any* mean "algunos". The difference is that *some* is used in affirmative sentences, and *any* is used in negative sentences and questions. These words can be used with nouns that are countable and plural or uncountable nouns.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

To make this more complicated, some nouns can be countable or uncountable depending on the context. An example is the word *pizza*. When *pizza* refers to a whole unit, it is countable. For example: *I bought three pizzas.* This means that someone bought three whole pizzas. But when pizza refers to a usable portion, it is uncountable. For example: *Is there any pizza? I want a slice.*

Notice that to make an uncountable noun countable, a unit of measure is needed—a quantity, the container, or the division/portion. In the example above, *slice* is the unit of measure. Other examples would be "2 cups of coffee" or "250ml of water". Liquids are always uncountable; to make them countable, the measurement must be used. Look at the charts below for more examples.

11-6 NOUNS THAT CAN BE COUNT OR NONCOUNT

Quite a few nouns can be used as either count or noncount nouns. Examples of both count and noncount usages for some common nouns follow.

NOUN	USED AS A **NONCOUNT** NOUN	USED AS A **COUNT** NOUN
glass	(a) Windows are made of ***glass***.	(b) I drank ***a glass*** of water. (c) Janet wears ***glasses*** when she reads.
hair	(d) Rita has brown ***hair***.	(e) There's ***a hair*** on my jacket.
iron	(f) ***Iron*** is a metal.	(g) I pressed my shirt with ***an iron***.
light	(h) I opened the curtain to let in ***some light***.	(i) Please turn off ***the lights*** *(lamps)*.
paper	(j) I need ***some paper*** to write a letter.	(k) I wrote ***a paper*** for Professor Lee. (l) I bought ***a paper*** *(a newspaper)*.
time	(m) How ***much time*** do you need to finish your work?	(n) How ***many times*** have you been in Mexico?
work	(o) I have ***some work*** to do tonight.	(p) That painting is ***a work*** of art.
coffee	(q) I had ***some coffee*** after dinner.	(r) ***Two coffees***, please.
chicken/ fish	(s) I ate ***some chicken/some fish***.	(t) She drew a picture of ***a chicken/a fish***.
experience	(u) I haven't had ***much experience*** with computers. (I don't have much knowledge or skill in using computers.)	(v) I had ***many*** interesting ***experiences*** on my trip. (Many interesting events happened to me on my trip.)

11-7 USING UNITS OF MEASURE WITH NONCOUNT NOUNS

(a) I had some tea.
(b) I had ***two cups of*** *tea*.
(c) I ate some toast.
(d) I ate ***one piece of*** *toast*.

To mention a specific quantity of a noncount noun, speakers use units of measure such as *two cups of* or *one piece of*. A unit of measure usually describes **the container** *(a cup of, a bowl of)*, **the amount** *(a pound of, a quart of)*,* or **the shape** *(a bar of soap, a sheet of paper)*.

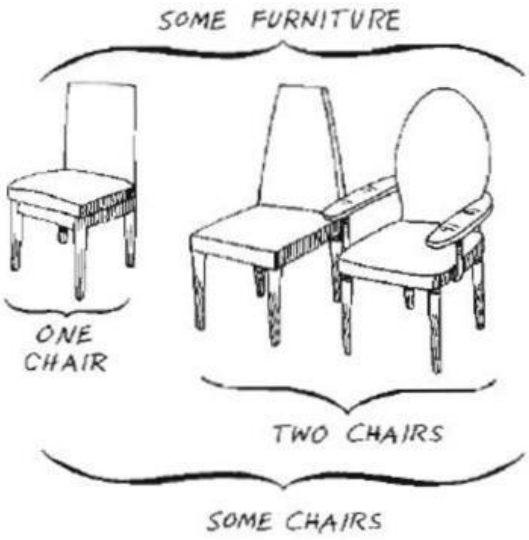
*Weight measure: *one pound* = 0.45 kilograms/kilos.
Liquid measure: *one quart* = 0.95 litres/liters; four quarts = one gallon = 3.8 litres/liters.

Let's practice...

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Find the errors in the following sentences. Some contain no errors. If a sentence is correct, click OK. If there is an error, click on the problematic word. There are two examples.

1. I bought one chair for my apartment. OK
2. I bought ~~one~~ furniture for my apartment. OK
3. I bought four chairs for my apartment. OK
4. I bought four furnitures for my apartment. OK
5. I bought a chair for my apartment. OK
6. I bought a furniture for my apartment. OK
7. I bought some chair for my apartment. OK
8. I bought some furnitures for my apartment. OK



Write *a/an* or *some* in the blanks. Identify countable and uncountable nouns.

1. I often have ___some___ **fruit** for dessert.	*fruit*	→	count (noncount)
2. I had ___a___ **banana** for dessert.	*banana*	→	(count) noncount
3. I got _____ **letter** today.	*letter*	→	count noncount
4. I got _____ **mail** today.	*mail*	→	count noncount
5. Anna wears _____ **ring** on her left hand.	*ring*	→	count noncount
6. Maria is wearing _____ **jewelry** today.	*jewelry*	→	count noncount
7. I have _____ **homework** to finish.	*homework*	→	count noncount
8. I have _____ **assignment** to finish.	*assignment*	→	count noncount
9. I needed _____ **information**.	*information*	→	count noncount
10. I asked _____ **question**.	*question*	→	count noncount

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Add the final –s/-es if necessary. Otherwise, write a 0 in the blank.

1. I made some **mistake** _s_ on my algebra test.
2. In winter in Alaska, there *((is), are)* **snow** _/_ on the ground.
3. Alaska has a lot of cold **weather** _____.
4. We have a lot of **storm** _____ in the winter.
5. There *(is, are)* some **chalk** _____ in this classroom.
6. Be sure to give the new couple my best **wish** _____.
7. I want to wish them good **luck** _____.
8. **Thunder** _____ and **lightning** _____ can be scary for children and animals.
9. **Gold** _____ *(is, are)* expensive. **Diamond** _____ *(is, are)* expensive too.
10. I admire Prof. Yoo for her extensive **knowledge** _____ of organic farming methods.
11. Prof. Yoo has a lot of good **idea** _____ and strong **opinion** _____.
12. Teaching children to read requires **patience** _____.
13. Doctors take care of **patient** _____.
14. Mr. Fernandez's English is improving. He's making a lot of **progress** _____.
15. Automobiles are the biggest source of **pollution** _____ in most cities.
16. Engineers build **bridge** _____ across **river** _____ and other **body** _____ of **water** _____.

Create questions with how many or how much. Use the information in parentheses to help you form the questions.

1. A: How many children do the Millers have ?
   B: Three. (The Millers have three children.)
2. A: How much money does Jake make ?
   B: A lot. (Jake makes a lot of money.)
3. A: How _____ on a soccer team?
   B: Eleven. (There are eleven players on a soccer team.)
4. A: How _____ to do tonight?
   B: Just a little. (I have just a little homework to do tonight.)
5. A: How _____ in the baskets?
   B: A lot. (There are a lot of apples in the baskets.)

LIVEWORKSHEETS

6. A: How _____ in the baskets?
   B: A lot. (There is a lot of fruit in the baskets.)

7. A: How _____ in Canada?
   B: Ten. (There are ten provinces in Canada.)

8. A: How _____ before you moved to Japan?
   B: Just a little. (I knew just a little Japanese before I moved to Japan.)

9. A: How _____ in the world?
   B: Approximately 22,000. (There are approximately 22,000 kinds of fish in the world.)

10. A: How _____?
    B: A lot. (You should buy a lot of cheese.) It looks really good.

11. A: How _____ every day?
    B: Two cups. (I drink two cups of coffee every day.)

12. A: How _____ in the chalk tray?
    B: Several pieces. (There are several pieces of chalk in the chalk tray.)

Complete the sentences with a few or a little and the given noun. Use the plural form of the noun when necessary.

REMINDER: Use *a few* with a count noun: *a few songs*.
Use *a little* with a noncount noun: *a little music*.

1. *music* I feel like listening to a little music tonight.
2. *song* We sang a few songs at the party.
3. *help* Do you need _____ with that?
4. *pepper* My grandfather doesn't use extra salt, but he always puts _____ on his hard-boiled egg
5. *thing* I need to pick up _____ at the market on my way home from work tonight.
6. ***apple*** I bought _____ at the market.*
7. ***fruit*** I bought _____ at the market.
8. *advice* I need _____.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

9. *money* If I accept that job, I'll make _____ more _____.

10. *coin* Annie put _____ in her pocket.

11. *friend* _____ came by last night to visit us.

12. *rain* It looks like we might get _____ today. I think I'll take my umbrella with me.

13. *French* I can speak _____, but I don't know any Italian at all.

14. *hour* Ron's plane will arrive in _____ more _____.

15. *toothpaste* Tommy, put just _____ on your toothbrush, not half the tube!

16. *chicken* I'm still hungry. I think I'll have _____ more _____.

17. *chicken* When I was a child, we raised _____ in our backyard.

LIVEWORKSHEETS