

# 12c

## countable and uncountable nouns

We can count countable nouns. A countable noun has both singular and plural forms:

**apple / apples child / children**

- We cannot count uncountable nouns. An uncountable noun has no plural form and we do not use it with *a / an*:

*We need new **furniture**.*

***Poverty** can lead to **unhappiness** and **despair**.*

- Opposite are some common errors:

~~X *The money are insufficient.*~~

✓ *The money is insufficient.*

~~X *They have many works to do.*~~

✓ *They have a lot of work to do.*

~~X *The news are very hopeful.*~~

✓ *The news is very hopeful.*

~~X *She gave me a good advice.*~~

✓ *She gave me some good advice.*

~~X *For long travels we use the train.*~~

✓ *For long journeys we use the train.*

Below is a summary of the basic differences between countable and uncountable nouns:

	countable example	uncountable example
use of <i>a, an, the</i>	<i>a book, the book</i>	<i>cheese, the cheese</i>
plural noun	<i>books, the books</i>	(no plural form)
<i>some</i> + noun	<i>some books</i>	<i>some cheese</i>
<i>any</i> + noun	<i>any book, any books</i>	<i>any cheese</i>
<i>enough</i> + noun	<i>enough books</i>	<i>enough cheese</i>
<i>many</i> + noun	<i>many books</i>	(not possible)
<i>few / a few</i> + noun	<i>(a) few books</i>	(not possible)
<i>less</i> + noun	(not possible)	<i>less cheese</i>
<i>little / a little</i> + noun	(not possible)	<i>(a) little cheese</i>
<i>much</i> + noun	(not possible)	<i>much cheese</i>
<i>that / this</i> + noun	<i>that / this book</i>	<i>that / this cheese</i>
<i>those / these</i> + noun	<i>those / these books</i>	(not possible)

- We can also say:  
*This is a **fine cheese**.* (= a fine variety or type)  
***These cheeses** are produced only in Italy.*  
(= these types of cheese)
- We can say *one fish, two fish, one deer, two deer*. We can also say *all the fishes in the sea*. (= the different varieties of fish)

### plural forms

- Here are nouns with regular plural forms:  
*computer / **computers***  
*address / **addresses***  
*box / **boxes***  
*city / **cities***  
*journey / **journeys***

- Here are examples of nouns with irregular plural forms:

*aircraft / **aircraft***

*calf / **calves***

*child / **children***

*cod / **cod***

*deer / **deer***

*foot / **feet***

*fish / **fish***

*fruit / **fruit***

*loaf / **loaves***

*mouse / **mice***

*rendezvous / **rendezvous***

*series / **series***

*species / **species***

*sheep / **sheep***

*tooth / **teeth***

*Walkman /*

***Walkmans***

*wife / **wives***

*woman / **women***

### common mistakes with plurals

- Some uncountable nouns are often countable nouns in other languages and will cause special difficulty. Here are some of the most common ones:

She gave me **advice** but I didn't listen.

Could you help me to carry all this **baggage**?

The **countryside** here is beautiful.

Accidents cause a lot of **damage** – be careful.

I don't feel comfortable with electronic **equipment**.

Can you give us any more **evidence**? This **evidence** is not very reliable.

I like your **furniture** – where did you get it?

Your **hair** looks great – how do you get it to look like that?

She is in very good **health**.

The teacher gives a lot of **homework** and expects it in on time.

Where do you get your **information** from – is it reliable?

Do you have much **knowledge** of economic theory?

I don't need this **money** – take it back.

The **news** says the **weather** is going to get better.

What he said was **nonsense** – wasn't it?

I've got **permission** to go.

You've made **progress** – keep trying.

I made the **spaghetti** especially for you – did you like it?

I had a lot of **work** to do in town and I've only just finished it. (Compare I had lots of jobs and I've only just finished them.)

- The words *means*, *series* and *species* look like plural nouns but they are usually countable and singular:
 

They found that the only **means** to cross the river was to swim.

Which is your favourite **series** on TV?

It was a **series** about an animal hospital.

One **species** is destroyed in forest fires every day.
- Spaghetti* looks like a plural noun but it is uncountable:
 

The **spaghetti** is ready.

### common uncountable nouns

- Below is a list of nouns which are uncountable. In some cases, there is a singular or plural use when we refer to a particular variety or example:

<b>absence</b>	<b>advice</b>	<b>age</b>
<b>agriculture</b>	<b>anger</b>	<b>atmosphere</b>
<b>baggage</b>	<b>beauty</b>	<b>behaviour</b>
<b>bread</b>	<b>childhood</b>	<b>comfort</b>
<b>company</b>	<b>concern</b>	<b>confidence</b>
<b>countryside</b>	<b>courage</b>	<b>damage</b>
<b>death</b>	<b>democracy</b>	<b>depression</b>
<b>design</b>	<b>duty</b>	<b>earth</b>
<b>education</b>	<b>electricity</b>	<b>energy</b>
<b>environment</b>	<b>equipment</b>	<b>evil</b>
<b>evidence</b>	<b>existence</b>	<b>experience</b>
<b>failure</b>	<b>faith</b>	<b>fear</b>
<b>flesh</b>	<b>food</b>	<b>freedom</b>
<b>fun</b>	<b>furniture</b>	<b>ground</b>
<b>growth</b>	<b>hair</b>	<b>happiness</b>
<b>health</b>	<b>help</b>	<b>homework</b>
<b>ice</b>	<b>industry</b>	<b>information</b>
<b>intelligence</b>	<b>justice</b>	<b>knowledge</b>
<b>love</b>	<b>luck</b>	<b>luggage</b>
<b>machinery</b>	<b>means</b>	<b>money</b>
<b>music</b>	<b>nature</b>	<b>news</b>
<b>nonsense</b>	<b>paper</b>	<b>peace</b>
<b>permission</b>	<b>poverty</b>	<b>pride</b>
<b>progress</b>	<b>reality</b>	<b>research</b>
<b>rubbish</b>	<b>seaside</b>	<b>spaghetti</b>
<b>traffic</b>	<b>training</b>	<b>transport</b>
<b>travel</b>	<b>weather</b>	<b>work</b>

- If we refer to a specific amount with certain uncountable nouns, we can use *a piece of*, *a bit of*, *a slice of*, etc:
 

**a bit of** cheese

**a blob of** paint

**a bunch of** flowers

**a cup of** coffee

**a drop of** water

**a glass of** orange juice

**a loaf of** bread

**a lump of** sugar

**a piece of** paper

**a pile of** rubbish

**a pool of** blood

**a portion of** chicken

**a slice of** bread

**a spot of** rain

**a touch of** flu

Some words can be both countable and uncountable. Here are examples:

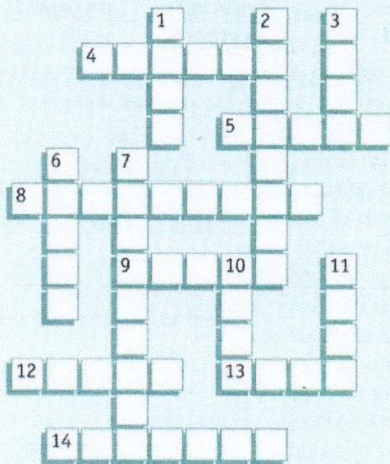
noun	countable example	uncountable example
<i>chicken</i>	He sat there and ate <b>a whole chicken</b> .	I'll have <b>some chicken</b> and chips, please.
<i>coffee</i>	I'd love <b>a coffee</b> now. (= cup of coffee)	Is there <b>any coffee</b> left?
<i>experience</i>	Failing an exam was <b>a new experience</b> for me.	Have you had <b>any previous experience</b> ?
<i>fruit</i>	A kumquat is <b>an exotic fruit</b> .	You should eat <b>fruit</b> every day.
<i>hair</i>	The cat has left <b>white hairs</b> all over the sofa.	Get <b>your hair</b> cut – it's getting too long.
<i>juice</i>	I'd like <b>an orange juice</b> , please. (= a glass of)	I'll just squeeze <b>some juice</b> from these oranges.
<i>noise</i>	I heard <b>a noise</b> outside the window.	Stop making <b>so much noise</b> .

Sometimes, the countable and uncountable forms have completely different meanings:

noun	countable example	uncountable example
<i>iron</i>	Is <b>the iron</b> hot enough?	Spinach is full of <b>iron</b> .
<i>paper</i>	Go to the newsagents and get me <b>a paper</b> , will you? (= newspaper)	You'll need <b>some paper</b> to write on.
<i>wood</i>	There's <b>a wood</b> near our house.	His sculpture was made of <b>wood</b> .
<i>work</i>	<b>the complete works</b> of Shakespeare	I've got <b>a bit of work</b> to do now.

## Practice

### 1 Complete the crossword using the clues.



#### Down

- By the time he got back, his ..... had grown past his shoulders.
- No wonder she looks so tired – she's got twelve ..... to look after.
- Have you heard from your parents? What's their latest ..... ?
- I don't know whether I prefer the ..... of Strauss or Mozart.
- Between the two of them, their ..... of how computers work is negligible.
- Do you agree that there's far too much ..... in the world?
- I've got a great deal of ..... left to do.

#### Across

- The ..... of elderly people can really suffer in the winter months.
- Within minutes, the vultures had stripped the bones of all their .....
- I have to move all my ..... to my new house by the weekend.
- I still stand by my claim that ..... make better drivers.
- They swallowed their ..... and apologised.
- With all the ..... in the world, I'm still not likely to pass this test.
- With the destruction of the rainforests, we're losing a hundred ..... per week.

**2 Fill in each space in the following sentences with an appropriate form of a countable or uncountable noun.**

- 1 I need some ..... about buying a house. I've never bought one before.
- 2 This type of bear has been declared an endangered .....
- 3 You should eat fresh ..... such as oranges every day.
- 4 ..... which is used by dentists should be kept clean.
- 5 *Beverly Hills 90210* is a TV ..... about young people in America.
- 6 She got ..... to leave class early because she wasn't feeling well.
- 7 Jane has long blond ..... that comes down to her shoulders.
- 8 Kids can use ..... for games but they also have access to the Internet.
- 9 You'll find all the ..... you need in the shed.
- 10 I have so much maths ..... to do that I won't be able to watch TV.

**3 Complete these pairs of sentences using the correct form of one of these words. Use *a / an* where necessary.**

*beer cod iron experience noise  
deer work*

- 1 I saw ..... grazing in the field and took a picture of it.  
Yesterday, there were ..... in the field but now they've gone.
- 2 Two pieces of ..... and some chips, please.  
The North Sea is full of .....
- 3 I'm thirsty. Let's have ..... in that pub over there.  
In Britain, people go to pubs to drink ....., not watch television.
- 4 The huge gate was made of .....  
John bought himself ..... and started ironing his own clothes.

- 5 She's had ..... with children before and would make a good baby-sitter.  
Moving house is ..... I'd rather forget.
- 6 *Hamlet* is one of Shakespeare's finest .....  
Gareth has been without ..... for six months now and jobs are hard to find.
- 7 She'd been working in her room till ..... disturbed her.  
In addition to car fumes, ..... can also be a form of pollution.

**4 Fill in the spaces in the following text with one appropriate word, or put – if no word is needed.**

### The chance of a job

David had been buying ..... (1) paper every day for months though he wasn't interested in ..... (2) news about the latest disasters around the world. It was ..... (3) work he wanted. David had been out of ..... (4) work for ages and when he got the chance of ..... (5) job in the local youth centre he applied at once. He rang and asked them for ..... (6) information about ..... (7) job and they told him he needed to have ..... (8) experience of working with ..... (9) children and if possible ..... (10) training in counselling techniques. David had quite a lot of ..... (11) knowledge of counselling because he had ..... (12) degree in psychology from ..... (13) Edinburgh University and at one time he had seriously considered doing ..... (14) research in educational psychology. Before going to the interview, he asked his mum for ..... (15) advice about what he should wear, and she told him to wear a suit and get his hair cut.