

Countable and Uncountable Nouns (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 particular noise)
- I bought a **paper** to read. (= a newspaper)
- There's a **hair** in my soup! (= one single hair)
- You can stay with us. We have a spare **room**. (= a room in a house)
- I had some interesting **experiences** while I was away. (= things that happened to me)
- Enjoy your vacation. Have a good **time**!
- I'd like a **coffee**, please. (= a cup of coffee)

Uncountable

- I can't work here. There's too much **noise**. (*not* too many noises)
- 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 any **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**.
- I like **coffee**. (= in general)

B

There are some nouns that are usually uncountable in English but often countable in other languages. For example:

advice	bread	furniture	luggage	progress	weather
baggage	chaos	information	news	scenery	work
behavior	damage	luck	permission	traffic	

These nouns are usually uncountable, so:

- 1) you cannot use *a/an* with them (you cannot say "a bread," "an advice," etc.) and
- 2) they are not usually plural (we do not say "breads," "advices," etc.):

- I'm going to buy some **bread**. *or* ... a loaf of **bread**. (*not* a bread)
- Enjoy your vacation! I hope you have good **weather**. (*not* a good weather)
- Where are you going to put all your **furniture**? (*not* furnitures)

News is uncountable, not plural:

- The **news** was very depressing. (*not* The news were)

Travel (*noun*) means *traveling in general*. You cannot say "a travel" to mean *a trip*:

- We had a very good **trip**. (*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 **suitcases**.
- These **chairs** are mine.
- It was 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 **luggage**. (*not* luggages)
- This **furniture** is mine.
- It was good **advice**.

Exercises

67.1 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 write some letters, but I don't have a paper / any paper to write on.
3. a) I thought there was somebody in the house because there was light / a light on inside.
b) Light / A light comes from the sun.
4. a) I was in a hurry this morning. I didn't have time / a time for breakfast.
b) "Did you have a good vacation?" "Yes, we had wonderful time / a wonderful time."
5. Sue was very helpful. She gave us some very useful advice / advices.
6. We had very good weather / a very good weather while we were in Toronto.
7. We were very unfortunate. We had bad luck / a bad luck.
8. It's very difficult to find a work / job at the moment.
9. Our travel / trip from London to Istanbul by train was very tiring.
10. When the fire alarm rang, there was total chaos / a total chaos.
11. I had to buy a / some bread because I wanted to make some sandwiches.
12. Bad news don't / doesn't make people happy.
13. Your hair is / Your hairs are too long. You should have it / them cut.
14. The damage / The damages caused by the storm will cost a lot to repair.

67.2 Complete the sentences using these words. Sometimes you need the plural (-s).

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. George is unemployed. He's looking for a _____.
8. George is unemployed. He's looking for _____.
9. If you want to leave work early, you have to ask for _____.
10. I don't think Ann will get the job. She doesn't have enough _____.
11. Rita has done many interesting things. She should write a book about her _____.

67.3 What do you say in these situations? Complete the sentences using words from Section B.

1. Your friends have just arrived at the station. You can't see any suitcases 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 city.
You say: I'd like _____.
3. You are a student at school. You want your teacher to advise you about which courses to take. You say: Can you give me _____ ?
4. You want to watch the news on TV, but you don't know what time it is on.
You ask your friend: What time _____ ?
5. You are standing on 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 to your friend: What _____ !