

Count and uncount nouns

I. Definitions of count and uncount nouns

II. Uncount nouns

III. Nouns that can be used both as uncountables and countables

I. Definitions of count and uncount nouns

Count(able) nouns refer to items that can be counted (*two books, five students*).

Uncount(able) nouns refer to items that **cannot be counted** (*water, music*),
are **not used with the indefinite article** (*a/an*),
have no plural forms,
are **followed by a singular verb**,
are used with **much, little, a little**.

Examples: *Water boils at 100°C.*

I have received information that the news of the Minister's resignation is true.

For exceptions see the **Notes** below.

II. Uncount nouns

1. The most common uncountable nouns

advice	baggage	education	equipment	evidence	furniture
homework	information	knowledge	luggage	machinery	money
news	progress	traffic	firmware	hardware	software

Notes:

- When referring to **individual items**, the following words can be used:

"some", "a piece of", "various/different kinds of".

a piece of/some equipment

various/different kinds of software

- In combination **with an adjective**, **"education"** and **"knowledge"** **do not take the indefinite article** when used **in a general sense**.

University education is one of the requirements for the job.

You need specialist knowledge if you want to invest your money profitably.

If, however, the combination expresses the **level of ability/achievement** or **personal achievement/ability**, the **indefinite article** is used.

a good education/a good knowledge of English

She has a university education.

He has a working knowledge of the system.

2. Mass nouns, e.g.

air	water	glass	paper	metal
silver	steel	iron	coffee	beer

Note:

Some of these nouns can also be used **as countables** when

- they express **different kinds**: *precious metals* but *the frame is made of metal*
- they have a **different meaning**: *an iron* (žehlička) *iron* (železo)
a glass (sklenice) *glass* (sklo)
a paper (článek; test) *paper* (papír)
- when they refer to **quantity**: *one beer/two beers, please* *beer*

3. Names of sciences, e.g.

acoustics	aerodynamics	economics	electronics
linguistics	logistics	mathematics	mechanics
physics	politics	statistics	thermodynamics

Note:

The following nouns are **followed by a plural verb** when used in a **different meaning**:

acoustics = the shape and size of a room, which affect the sound you hear

economics = the way in which money influences, or is organized within an area of business or society

But: **economy** = the relationship between production, trade and the supply of money in a particular country/region

electronics = electronic devices

logistics = the planning and organization of a complex operation

mechanics = the way in which something works or is done

politics = political activities

statistics = a set of numbers representing facts or measurements

4. Some abstract nouns, e.g.

attention	chaos	damage	harm	inflation
isolation	music	publicity	resistance	safety

Note:

The plural form **"damages"** means money paid to someone for harming them or their property (= odškodné).

The damages he was ordered to pay were set at 1,000 dollars.

III. Nouns that can be used both as uncountables and countables

Some nouns are used as **uncountables** when referring to something **in general**,
and as **countables** when referring to something **specific**, e.g.,

experience	gas	light	noise
quality	quantity	work	<i>chemical elements, e.g. hydrogen, oxygen</i>

Uncountables

*He has long teaching **experience**.
at the speed of **light***

Noise is a kind of pollution.

*His work has improved in both **quality**
and **quantity**.*

*She starts **work** at 8.00.*

*He is out of **work**.*

*a cloud of toxic **gas***

Countables

*They exchanged holiday **experiences**.*

*switch on **the lights***

*traffic **lights***

*Try not to make **a noise**.*

*They produce goods in large **quantities**.*

***a work** of art*

*the collected **works** of Dickens*

*oxygen is **a gas***

*Water is composed of **two hydrogens** and
one oxygen.*

Remember

A good monolingual dictionary will give you detailed information on when nouns are used as countables and when as uncountables. In each entry you will find the letters **U** (uncountable) and/or **C** (countable) before the explanation of the meaning and examples of usage.

EXERCISES

I. The following sentences contain some very common mistakes. Find them and correct them.

1. Do you have any informations about the conference to be held in London next year?
.....

2. He had poor education. He dropped out of school without any qualifications.
.....

3. To be able to make a decision, we need detailed knowledge of the situation.
.....

4. He gave me a very useful advice.
.....

5. Could you recommend a firmware that best suits this purpose?
.....

6. All our equipments are carefully maintained.
.....

7. I have to do a homework for tomorrow.
.....

8. No news are good news.
.....

9. He designed an antivirus software.
.....

10. We'll surely find an opportunity to exchange informations at tomorrow's meeting.
.....

11. A significant progress has been made in reducing pollution in this area.
.....

12. We're late because we were caught up in a heavy traffic on our way here.
.....

.....
13. What are your experiences of working with a computer?
.....

II. Translate.

1. Ten manuál je plný dobrých rad.
.....
2. Základní znalosti matematiky jsou podstatné pro tento kurz.
.....
3. Jsi si jist, že tyto informace jsou správné?
.....
4. Budeme potřebovat lepší software.
.....
5. Mám pro tebe zajímavou novinu.
.....
6. S těmito penězi si budeme moci koupit jedno nové zařízení pro naši laboratoř.
.....
7. Internet je cenným zdrojem informací.
.....
8. Kolik máte zavazadel?
.....
9. Vzdělání dospělých se stalo důležitou součástí našeho školského systému.
.....
10. Naše hypotéza se zakládá na současných vědeckých poznatcích.
.....
11. Taková práce vyžaduje dobré technické vzdělání.
.....
12. V tomto případě peníze nehrají roli.
.....
13. Tento kurz předpokládá, že už máte nějaké znalosti fyziky.
.....
14. Hlavním požadavkem pro získání tohoto místa jsou odborné znalosti.
.....
15. Nejsou důkazy, že se ekonomika zlepšuje.
.....
16. Místo aby chemici říkali, že např. kyselina sírová - H_2SO_4 - má čtyři atomy kyslíku, řeknou zkráceně, že má čtyři kyslíky.
.....

III. Fill in the indefinite article where necessary.

1. I don't like artificial light.
2. The incessant hammering from next door was very irritating noise.
3. The reporter said that major new work by the famous film director Spielberg will be released soon.
4. The partition is made of glass.
5. Long-term exposure to high levels of noise can impair your hearing.
6. The driver was fined because he failed to stop at red light.

7. Essentially, steel is an alloy of iron and carbon.
8. He avoids work whenever he can.

IV. Tick the correct forms of verbs.

1. Acoustics is/are the scientific study of sound.
2. Statistics shows/show that 50% of the first-year students leave the University.
3. The logistics of moving the library from the old building to the new one was/were very complex.
4. Economics is/are the oldest of the social sciences.
5. Politics has/have never interested him.
6. The economics of this plan has/have to be looked into very carefully.
7. Fluid mechanics is/are taught at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering.
8. Consumer electronics sells/sell well.
9. Statistics is/are my favourite course.
10. The mechanics of this operation is/are quite simple.
11. The economics of this project is/are very encouraging.