

A noun (person, place, idea, or thing) can be divided into two categories: count and noncount nouns. Count nouns are nouns that can be counted from one to anything else. Noncount nouns get their name from the fact they cannot be counted or pluralized. For example, you would never say, "There are three airs outside." It is useful to have a reminder of some of the noncount nouns and to know how they operate along with other grammatical concepts.

Common Noncount Nouns

It helps to group noncount nouns into six main categories: Food and Drink, Abstract Nouns, Fields of Study, Sports and Recreations, and Amorphous Nouns (liquids and gases).

Food and Drink	Abstract Nouns	Fields of Study	Sports and Recreation	Solids, Minerals, and Materials	Amorphous Nouns
beef, bread, candy, cereal, cheese, honey, water, pasta, corn, broccoli, spinach, milk,	happiness, research, evidence, information, damage, luck, advice, news	advertising, biology, sociology, economics, law, mechanics, engineering	archery, jogging, tennis, soccer, bowling, hockey, basketball, lifting, swimming	wool, coal, wood, gold, lead, soap, steel, iron, plastic, glass, concrete, silver, titanium, cotton	snow, rain, smoke, gasoline, steam, air, electricity, oxygen, hydrogen

Using Noncount Nouns with Articles

Definite Article

All categories of noncount nouns can take the definite article "the." As with singular and plural nouns, use the definite article when the noun you are looking at is specific and one of a kind, not general. EX: The heat was overwhelming yesterday.

Indefinite Article

Noncount nouns **never take an indefinite article**, as "a/an" denotes one of something, and noncount nouns cannot be counted.

Using Units and Quantifiers to Measure Noncount Nouns

Although noncount nouns cannot be counted, there are times when noncount nouns will be measured by units and/or quantified in some way.

Examples

	Pasta	Evidence	Advertising	Soccer	Wool	Snow
Unit	Four cups of pasta are needed for the recipe.	He had two pieces of evidence to use.	I took two classes in advertising.	We played two games of soccer.	I need three spools of wool.	They said to expect five inches of snow.
Quantifier	I ate some pasta.	He only needed a little bit of evidence for proof.	I know more about advertising than you.	We watched plenty of soccer yesterday.	This sweater needs less wool.	We need a lot of snow if we want time off from school.

Noncount Noun Exceptions

Noncount nouns typically cannot be made countable, but there are exceptions, usually occurring when the meaning or context of the noun changes. Keep a list of the exceptions as you find them.

Noncount	Count	Explanation
Would you like some coffee ?	He ordered a coffee .	The noncount version refers to the drink (coffee) in general. The count version refers to a cup of coffee, but the word designating the unit has been omitted.
There is no truth to the rumors.	We hold these truths to be self-evident.	The noncount version refers to quality of being true. The count version changes the meaning of "truth" to facts and statements that are true.
He wants chocolate on his sundae.	I had two chocolates for dinner.	The noncount refers to the substance of chocolate. The count version refers to two pieces or units of chocolate.

Exercise 1

Look at the underlined portion of the sentences below and decide if usage of the noun makes sense by circling ✓ or X.

- 1. Three dogs walked home last night. ✓ X
- 2. I want some pastas for dinner. ✓ X
- 3. The heats that swept Colorado were humid. ✓ X
- 4. I studied engineerings in college. ✓ X
- 5. Let's play some basketball tomorrow. ✓ X
- 6. The truck is made out of titaniums. ✓ X
- 7. We need an oxygen to survive. ✓ X

Exercise 1: Answer Key

- 1. ✓
- 2. X
- 3. X
- 4. X
- 5. ✓
- 6. X
- 7. X

Exercise 2

Complete the sentences by filling in the lines with appropriate quantifiers or units.

- 1. He wanted _____broccoli.
- 2. She has _____confidence.
- 3. We played _____of football.
- 4. Don't expect _____snow today.
- 5. She gave me _____of soup.
- 6. I need _____advice about moving.

Exercise 2: Possible Answer Key

- 1. some
- 2. a lot of
- 3. two games
- 4. any
- 5. a bowl
- 6. some