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).

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

**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**
  - Unit: Four cups of pasta are needed for the recipe.
  - Quantifier: I ate some pasta.

- **Evidence**
  - He had two pieces of evidence to use.
  - He only needed a little bit of evidence for proof.

- **Advertising**
  - I took two classes in advertising.
  - I know more about advertising than you.

- **Soccer**
  - We played two games of soccer.
  - We watched plenty of soccer yesterday.

- **Wool**
  - I need three spools of wool.
  - This sweater needs less wool.

- **Snow**
  - They said to expect five inches of snow.
  - 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noncount</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would you like some coffee?</td>
<td>He ordered a coffee.</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no truth to the rumors.</td>
<td>We hold these truths to be self-evident.</td>
<td>The noncount version refers to quality of being true. The count version changes the meaning of “truth” to facts and statements that are true.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He wants chocolate on his sundae.</td>
<td>I had two chocolates for dinner.</td>
<td>The noncount refers to the substance of chocolate. The count version refers to two pieces or units of chocolate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exercise 1

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

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

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 1: Answer Key

✗ 7.
✗ 6.
✓ 5.
✓ 4.
✓ 3.
✗ 2.
✓ 1.

Exercise 2: Possible Answer Key

6. some
d.
a bowl

✗ 5.
✗ 4.

✓ 3.
✓ 2.

✗ 1.

some

two games

a lot of

some