

Countable and uncountable nouns

Countable nouns can have 'a' or 'an' in front of them, and you can use them in the plural. The following are all countable nouns:

table, hand, house, plate, idea, book, headache

Uncountable nouns cannot have 'a' or 'an' in front of them, and they cannot be used in the plural. The following are all uncountable nouns:

anger, water, snow, bread, fun, glue, laughter

Exercise 1

Look at the underlined noun in each sentence, and say whether it is countable or uncountable:

1. She enjoys playing golf.
2. Kick the ball over here.
3. My favourite subject at school is geography.
4. I saw a photograph of the building.
5. I have hurt my shoulder.
6. Could I have some more milk, please?
7. May I have another slice of bread, please?
8. Strong winds damaged the roof.

Exercise 2

Some words can be countable or uncountable. Often they have slightly different meanings. Usually, the uncountable meaning is more general. Compare these pairs of sentences:

He has black hair. The builders made a lot of noise.
I found a hair in my soup. I heard a strange noise.

Look at the underlined noun in each sentence, and say whether it is being used with a countable or an uncountable meaning:

1. Many people died from disease and starvation.
2. The walls were made of glass.
3. My favourite ballet is Swan Lake.
4. The building was destroyed by fire.
5. The chicken flew into our garden.
6. Use a cloth to clean up the water.
7. Her speech is affected by the illness.
8. I really should take more exercise.

Exercise 3

Countable nouns that are singular (not in the plural) *always* need 'a', 'an', 'my/his, etc' or 'the' in front of them.

Add 'a' or 'an' where they are needed in the sentences below. Not all the sentences need them:

1. I'm going to have shower.
2. She poured cream on the fruit.
3. He is training to be mechanic.
4. Would you like apple?
5. The room was filled with smoke.

Exercise 4

Use a word from the box to complete these sentences. Remember to add 'a' or 'an' if they are needed:

farm pasta accident book lawyer sugar

1. I thought we could have with tomato sauce for lunch.
2. I spent the summer working on
3. She is studying to become
4. He was killed in on the mountain.
5. Do you take in your coffee?
6. I read about organic gardening.

Exercise 5

The words 'some', 'any' and 'a lot of' can be used with countable and uncountable nouns. However, 'many' is only used with countable nouns, and 'much' is only used with uncountable nouns.

Choose the correct word from the right to complete these sentences:

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|--|----------------|
| 1. I have invited friends over for dinner. | some/much/any |
| 2. Hurry up – we haven't got time. | some/much/many |
| 3. I'm not a vegetarian, but I don't eat meat. | some/much/many |
| 4. I haven't got clean clothes to wear. | some/much/any |
| 5. How people were at the talk? | some/much/many |
| 6. Could you lend me money for a cup of tea? | some/much/any |

Exercise 6

You can often use 'a' or 'an' with uncountable nouns if you put another noun + **of** in front of them (e.g. *a drop of blood, a piece of information*)

Use a word from the box to complete these sentences. Be careful to use plurals where they are needed. For some sentences, more than one answer is possible:

slice cup piece grain item drop

1. I'd love a of coffee.
2. They bought a new of equipment.
3. Brush any of sand off your skin.
4. Remove all of clothing.
5. She spilled a few of milk on the table.
6. I cut myself a of bread.

Exercise 7

There are some very common words which are uncountable, and learners of English often make mistakes with them. Try to remember that all the words in the following box are uncountable, and you should not try to make them plural:

advice equipment furniture homework information luggage transport accommodation

Look at the following sentences and correct them if they are wrong:

1. We bought some new furnitures for our flat.
2. Do you have many homework to do?
3. Could you give me some advice about buying a computer?
4. My luggages were very heavy.
5. I need to organize a transport to London for thirty children.
6. We are looking for cheap accommodation in the city.
7. All the equipments are old and need to be replaced.
8. Where can I find informations about English courses?