

PLURALS, UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS, QUANTIFIERS

Of the three related areas here, plural nouns should require the least time and effort. It is, of course, necessary to learn the most common irregular plurals.

A much larger question is words that *do not have* plurals: uncountable or 'mass' nouns. There are frequent and typical errors concerning these words. It might seem normal to put an 's' at the end of 'information' when you are thinking of several pieces of information, but nearly always we do not do this.

A simple test for an uncountable word is to ask a 'how much/how many?' question about it. In other words, you use a *quantifier*. If 'how much?' is correct, the word is uncountable.

Note, however, that some words can be either countable or uncountable depending on the context, so be careful to take this into account.

PLURAL NOUNS AND IRREGULAR PLURALS

There are sometimes problems associated with plurals. Here are a few common ones:

'**Fish**' is a more common plural than '**fishes**'. There are other invariable nouns, such as '**sheep**' and '**deer**'.

Words such as '**jeans**' '**pants**' (US), '**trousers**', '**scissors**' are followed by a plural verb form.

*The jeans **were** more expensive than the jacket.*

*The scissors **are** on the table.*

The plural of '**medium**' (press, TV etc.) is '**the media**'. (Not '**media**s')

The plural of '**phenomenon**' is '**phenomena**'.

The usual plural of '**person**' is '**people**'. The word 'persons' is formal, and rarely used in spoken English.

'**Police**' is a plural noun, and is followed by a plural verb form.

*The police **are** under pressure to find those responsible for the crime.*

UNCOUNTABLE WORDS

If a noun is uncountable:

- it does not have a plural

information-**s**, equipment-**s**, advice**s**, sightseeings**s**

- it is not used with 'a' or 'an'

a weather, **a** furniture, **a** luggage, **a** news

Many nouns which are usually uncountable can become countable:

*It's **a wine** from the southeast of France.*

Others, for example the words above, are almost never made countable.

QUANTIFYING

Here is a list of quantifiers, where 'C' means 'countable' and 'U' means 'uncountable':

I have very few + C

I have very little + U

I have hardly any + C/U

I have almost no + C/U

I don't have many + C (at all)

I don't have much + U (at all)

I have a few + C

I have a little + U

I have some + C/U

I have quite a few + C

I have quite a bit of + U

I have quite/rather a lot of + C/U

I have a lot of/lots of + C/U

I have plenty of + C/U

I have a great many + C

I have a great deal / amount of + U

POINTS TO REMEMBER

'Many' and 'much' are formal in affirmative sentences. Spoken English prefers 'a lot of':
I met a lot of old friends I hadn't seen for ages. (Not 'I met many...')

'Few' and 'little' have a *very* negative meaning, and are not the same as 'a few', 'a little'.

'Plenty of' is a subjective expression meaning 'more than enough':

There were a lot of people at the party. (Not 'There were plenty of...')

'Hardly' is used with words such as 'any' or 'anyone', not with 'no' or 'no-one'.

Exercise 1

Choose the correct words to complete each sentence.

1. I'll go shopping. We have milk left.

- a) no
- b) any

2. Let me give you advice. You can't eat too fresh fruit.

- a) an - many
- b) some - much

3. Each one of us a different approach to the question.

- a) has
- b) have

4. Here's news you'll be interested in.

- a) a
- b) some

5. When I arrived at the party, there was hardly food left.

- a) any

b) no

6. It's going to be hot today. I'll put on shorts.

a) a

b) some

7. We first met on holiday years ago.

a) few

b) a few

8. The police been interviewing witnesses.

a) has

b) have

9. I got very sleep last night.

a) little

b) much

10. Look at that! There are people over there dressed as clowns!

a) a lot of

b) many

Exercise 2

Are the highlighted words in these sentences countable (C) or uncountable (U)?

1. Major airports, ports, and stations always have a place for lost **luggage**.

C

U

2. On the day of the test, you will not be allowed to keep your personal **belongings** with you.

C

U

3. The island has promoted itself successfully, and **tourism** is booming.

C

U

4. We regret that we cannot give proprietary **information** about our company's activities.

C

U

5. Starting from now, we need to spend much more on **advertising**.

C

U

6. There is no other **place** like Machu Pichu in the world.

C

U

7. Our promotional campaign has generated a lot of news **coverage**.

C

U

8. I couldn't find any **bargains** in the sales.

C

U

9. Prices on watches and **jewelry** have been reduced.

C

U

10. My **suitcase** was the first one off the baggage claim, so I was able to leave the airport quickly.

C

U

Exercise 3

Choose the correct words to complete each sentence.

1. In ways, we should be proud of what we've achieved so far.

- a) many
- b) much
- c) a lot

2. Very of the applicants that we interviewed had the necessary qualifications.

- a) few
- b) little
- c) much

3. Americans cannot name all 50 states.

- a) Each
- b) Every
- c) Plenty of

4. Hardly of the employees voted in favor of the new pay offer.

- a) none
- b) any
- c) some

5. likes their work to be taken for granted.

- a) Nobody
- b) Anybody
- c) Somebody

6. We can win new friends by being open about our intentions.

- a) any
- b) some
- c) much

7. people visit the monument every year.

- a) Very much
- b) A vast amount of
- c) A great many

8. The merger between the two companies is important for reasons.

so much
multitude
a variety of

9. We encountered of problems during the installation process.

a) a number
b) a quantity
c) an amount

10. It is not known exactly..... exposure to the material is hazardous.

a) a little
b) how much
c) any

ARTICLES: THE, A/AN

The grammar of English is relatively simple, but there are aspects of the language which are hard to master. One of the biggest problems concerns when to use, or not use, the articles 'the' and 'a/an'.

A few basic principles are not difficult to understand. For example, 'a' or 'an' are always used before somebody's job: '*she's **an** engineer*'. However, it is often necessary to consider whether a noun is countable or uncountable. If it is uncountable, you do not use 'a' or 'an'.

You will also frequently have to decide whether there is a specific reference to something in the plural – '***the** dogs are hungry*' – or whether the reference is general – '*dogs are faithful companions*'. Here, there is no article (represented by the symbol Ø in the exercises). Many times, 'no article' is the right choice, but there are many others when it is not.

USE OF ARTICLES: BASIC POINTS

A / AN

The indefinite articles 'a' and 'an' are used with singular countable nouns.

They are never used before uncountable nouns (news, information, equipment etc), but can be used with many nouns which may be both countable and uncountable:

She has a fear of heights.

It's a red wine from the southwest.

The 'an' form is used before a few words beginning with a silent 'h' (hour, honour, honest etc) and before words beginning with vowels, with the exception of a large number of words that start with 'u'. This is a pronunciation point. We say 'an umbrella', but 'a university'. Note the difference between the two 'u' sounds.

THE

The definite article 'the' is used for *specific* reference to all nouns: singular, plural and uncountable:

I think the car in front of me was going too fast.

Suddenly, the two cars collided.

It was the rain that caused the accident.

Nouns linked by 'of' normally require 'the', especially before the first noun:
the top of the packet.....the introduction of the euro.....the end of an era.....

Ø (MEANING 'NO ARTICLE')

No article is used before plural countable nouns when they are considered as complete classes:
Dogs need a lot of exercise.
Politicians make me laugh.

No article is used before a *general* use of uncountable nouns (pollution, health, smoking etc.):
Smoking kills.
Good health is the main thing in life.

Note however:

The pollution over this city is hazardous to the health of its inhabitants.

No article is used before the names of sports, academic subjects, activities using 'ing' or hobbies.

It is not an option to use no article before singular countable nouns ('car' etc) except in note form and in expressions such as 'in bed, 'in hospital', go to school etc. Similarly, (with uncountable nouns) 'have lunch, 'go to work' etc.

GENERAL STATEMENTS

In more formal language, a general statement is often made using 'the':

The rich have benefitted from changes to the tax laws.

The arctic fox possesses a coat which is perfectly adapted to its winter habitat.

(Note that these refer to all rich people and all arctic foxes.)

The following are all correct general statements and mean the same:

The anaconda can grow to a length of up to 20 feet.

Anacondas can grow to a length of up to 20 feet.

An anaconda can grow to a length of up to 20 feet.

POINTS TO REMEMBER AND ERRORS TO AVOID

The indefinite articles 'a' and 'an' are used before all names of jobs:

He's a lawyer and she's an accountant.

They are used in expressions such as 'twice a week' and 'fifty dollars an ounce'.

Note that 'another' is one word.

The definite article 'the' is **not** used in the expressions 'last/next week, month, year' etc.

It is **not** used before expressions such as 'most people' or 'most of the time'.

We say 'the media', and 'the environment'.

There is a difference between 'others' and 'the others':

That's what you think, but others might disagree.

(Anybody might disagree.)

A few people agreed with him, but the others in the room voted 'no'.

(A specific number disagreed.)

Exercise 1

Are these sentences correct or incorrect? Correct any errors.

1. She's wearing an old jeans.
2. Animals are forbidden.
3. The maths is my favourite subject.
4. Last year I went to USA.
5. Excuse me! Where is Tower of London?
6. Is he still in bed?
7. I'd like an information please.
8. The whale is in danger of extinction.
9. News you told me was shocking.
10. The most students passed the exam.

Exercise 2

Put either 'a' or 'an' before the words below. Only one of them is correct each time.

1.
..... hotel on the coast
2.
..... honour to meet you
3.
..... historic event
4.
..... European tourist
5.
..... UFO
6.
..... Unidentified Flying Object
7.
..... MP (Member of Parliament)
8.
..... university graduate

9.

..... horrific experience

10.

..... hourly repetition

Exercise 3

Use an article or Ø (nothing) to complete the following sentences correctly.

1. Dr Arnaldi is psychologist who has studied relationships at work between colleagues.

a) Ø

b) a

2. He is graduate of one of the world's most prestigious universities.

a) Ø

b) a

3. In recent years English language has dominated the world of business communications.

a) Ø

b) the

4. Over years, the company has gained the trust of its customers.

a) Ø

b) the

5. We know that more research is required before we can embark on the project.

a) Ø

b) the

6. Unfortunately, new regulation will prevent us from operating as before.

a) Ø

b) a

7. Unemployment is most apparent among young people between 18 and 25.

a) Ø

b) a

8. The rainy conditions have spread towards central Texas.

a) Ø

b) the

9. Each apartment has fully equipped kitchen.

a) Ø

b) a

10. We will send you invoice within the next few days..

a) Ø

b) an

11. Putting your online comment in capital letters is digital equivalent of shouting.

a) Ø

b) the

12. Many colleges now offer popular courses in art and science of gaming.

a) Ø

b) the

13. In recent years, educational software has become a very competitive market.

a) Ø

b) the

14. The company will be offering three-day training course next April.

a) Ø

b) a

15. If demand increases, we will have to be able to meet it.

a) Ø

b) a

16. A high level in math is one of fundamental requirements for this position.

a) Ø

b) the

17. It seems that more progress we make, more problems we encounter.

a) Ø / Ø

b) the / the

18. We are confident that most of our graduates will find suitable employment within one year.

a) Ø

b) the

19. The retailer aims to make substantial savings in operating costs over next three years.

a) Ø

b) the

20. Traditional supermarkets are suffering as a result of rise of cheap discount stores.

a) Ø

b) the

a witness – someone who sees something happen, especially a crime

luggage – baggage

belongings – objects which belong to someone

coverage – the media attention given to something

bargains – products or services obtained at a very favourable price

the sales – period of reduced prices for consumers

jewelry – rings, necklaces, bracelets, earrings etc.

baggage claim – place in an airport where you pick up your luggage at the end of a flight

to take something for granted – to ignore someone's effort or the difficulty involved

a merger – the joining of two or more companies

to shout – to talk much too loudly

an invoice – an itemized list of sums due, a bill

a retailer – a person or company selling directly to consumers