

# Uncountable Nouns

Comprehensive Notes and Practice for ESL Learners



sugar



lumps of sugar

Online version:

[www.roadtogrammar.com/uncountablenouns](http://www.roadtogrammar.com/uncountablenouns)

## Part 1

# Introduction

### What is an uncountable noun?

An uncountable noun cannot be counted. For example, we can count cars, but we cannot count water. Water is a substance.

Notice that 'sugar' is an uncountable noun. We can count lumps of sugar, but not sugar in general.



Note that 'people' is a countable noun. Even though there is no -s ending, we can count people (3 people, 4 people etc.)

\*Note - Countable nouns are sometimes called count nouns and uncountable nouns are sometimes called non-count nouns.

### Examples of Countable Nouns:

car	table
book	noun
person	day
phone	cookie
cat	kid

### Examples of Uncountable Nouns:

Uncountable nouns are often types of food, materials or abstract concepts.

salt	weather	oxygen	patience
sugar	butter	milk	knowledge
information	oil	luck	homework
work	advice	meat	happiness
wool	pepper	honesty	honey

# Exercise 1

Which of these words are uncountable?

Tick the words that are uncountable. Answers are on page 12.

- |                                  |                                    |                                    |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> methane | <input type="checkbox"/> shoe      | <input type="checkbox"/> finger    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> advice  | <input type="checkbox"/> target    | <input type="checkbox"/> battery   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> smoke   | <input type="checkbox"/> chocolate | <input type="checkbox"/> kid       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> wool    | <input type="checkbox"/> mustard   | <input type="checkbox"/> pasta     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> meat    | <input type="checkbox"/> mouse     | <input type="checkbox"/> cellphone |

Do you need more practice? Try many more exercises at <http://www.roadtogrammar.com/uncountablenouns>

## Part 2

# Amounts and Quantities

Let's review some rules:

1 We do not use numbers with uncountable nouns.

Wrong:	He told me three informations.
Right:	He told me three pieces of information.

2 We do not add -s to uncountable nouns.

Wrong:	These informations is wrong.
Right:	This information is wrong.

3 We treat an uncountable noun as a singular verb:

Wrong:	these information
Right:	this information

Wrong:	Your information are correct.
Right:	Your information is correct.



4 We can use **'some'** and **'any'** with both uncountable and countable nouns:

He gave me **some** information.  
He gave me **some** apples.

5 With countable nouns, we use **'few'** and **'a few'**. With uncountable nouns, we use **'little'** and **'a little'**:

I ate **a few** apples.  
I ate **a little** cheese.

6 Because **'a'** means **'one'**, with uncountable nouns, we can use **'the'**, but not **'a'**:

Correct: The bread from that shop is tasty.  
Wrong: I bought a bread from that shop.

7 With uncountable nouns, we cannot use **'many'**, but we can use **'lots of'**, **'a lot of'** and **'much'**:

Wrong: They bake many bread in that shop.  
Right: They bake a lot of bread in that shop.  
Right: They bake lots of bread in that shop.  
Right: Do they bake much bread in that shop?

8 We can use **'more'** with uncountable nouns:

Would you like some more water?

## Exercise 2

Are the following sentences grammatically correct? If not, try to think of a way to correct them.

1. Can you pass a salt?
2. Could you pass the salt?
3. This sugar is lovely.
4. Can you pass me a meat?
5. I have so many homeworks to do.
6. Most of this information are correct.
7. Do you have any information that would be useful?
8. My work is difficult.
9. These jam looks tasty.
10. This pasta taste great!
11. Can I borrow a little wool from you?
12. We're having some great weather at the moment.
13. Add lots of oil to the pan.
14. I only have a few money left.
15. Henry gave me a useful advice.
16. My sister doesn't give me much advice.

## Part 3

# Difficult and Special Cases

Let's review some words that can be especially confusing:

**Furniture** (uncountable)

Furniture may seem like a countable noun, but it is uncountable. Furniture always refers to a group of objects.

*We bought some furniture for our new apartment.*

**Equipment** (uncountable)

Like furniture, equipment always refers to a group of items. It is uncountable.

*We bought some new equipment for our factory.*

**Luggage** (uncountable)

Like furniture, luggage always refers to a group of items (a group of bags or suitcases). It is uncountable. Baggage is also uncountable.

*He brought plenty of luggage with him.*

**Jewelry** (uncountable)

Jewelry is another group noun.

Correct: *I have a lot of jewelry*  
Wrong: *I have a lot of jewelries.*



**Traffic** (uncountable)

Traffic is a group noun.

*There was so much traffic on the road this morning!*

**Fruit** (uncountable)

Fruit refers to a group of items (pieces of fruit). It is uncountable. **Strawberry, banana, apple** etc. are all countable nouns.

*I ate some fruit. I ate some bananas.*

**News** (uncountable)

News is an uncountable noun even though it is spelled with an -s:

Correct: *We have some good news.*

Wrong: *We have a good news.*

**Coffee** (uncountable and sometimes countable)

Strictly speaking, coffee is an uncountable noun:

*I like to drink coffee.*

However, when ordering in a café or restaurant, it is used as a countable noun:

*Could I have three coffees, please?*

Words for other drinks, such as tea, wine and beer are used in the same way.

**Paper** (countable or uncountable, depending on the meaning)

Usually paper is uncountable:

*Could I have some paper?*

*I need three sheets of paper.*

When the meaning is 'report', it is countable:

*Dr Kaki has published a paper on Global Warming.*

**Money** (uncountable)

Money is uncountable. However, units of money (dollars, euros) are often countable:

*Could I borrow some money?*

*Could I borrow three dollars?*

Other units of currency are countable, but do not take a plural -s (meaning that they are irregular plurals):

*It cost me 200 yen.*

*The price is fifty lira.*

'Cash' is uncountable



**Chicken** (countable or uncountable, depending on the meaning)

The word chicken is countable when it refers to the animal, but uncountable when it refers to the food.

*The farmer has over three hundred chickens.  
Would you like some more chicken?*

**Software** (uncountable)

Software is uncountable, 'program' is countable, as is 'application'.

*We need to purchase some software.  
We need to purchase some computer programs.  
We need to purchase some applications.*

Like software, hardware is uncountable.

**Work** (uncountable or countable, depending on the meaning)

Work, homework and housework are all uncountable.

*I have some work to do.  
I have some homework to do.*

*I have several tasks to do.  
I have several assignments to do.*

There is another meaning of work, as in 'work of art'. This meaning of work is countable:

*Several works of art were stolen from the museum.*

**Time** (uncountable or countable, depending on the meaning)

Time, in general is uncountable:

*I don't have much time.*

Time, when it means 'occasion', is countable:

*How many times have you watched that movie?*



**Hair** (uncountable or countable, depending on the meaning)

When referring to strands (pieces) of hair, the word is countable, but hair is usually a group word, referring to all the individual hairs on a person's head.

*She has beautiful hair.  
There's a hair in my salad!*

**Fish** (countable or uncountable, depending on the meaning)

When 'fish' describes the food, it is always uncountable:

*We ate some delicious fish.*

To describe the living creature, this word is countable but is usually spelled without -es:

*There were three fish in the pond.  
There were three fishes in the pond.* (correct, but less common)

## Part 4

# Adding -s to Uncountable Nouns

**Adding -s changes the meaning**

We know that 'food' is an uncountable noun. Yet you may sometimes see the word 'foods'.

For example, on a shop sign: Harry's Fine Foods

In this case, 'foods' = kinds of food

We can use most uncountable nouns in this way:

Coffees = kind of coffee  
Teas = kinds of tea



*Many teas are imported from Sri Lanka*



Meats = kinds of meat

*Meats that are low in cholesterol include chicken and turkey.*

Even though 'people' is not an uncountable noun, it follows this rule:

Peoples = kinds of people

*The peoples of the South Pacific include islanders from Fiji, Kiribati and Samoa.*

## Exercise 3

This exercise will test you on the previous two points:

Difficult and special cases  
Adding -s to uncountable nouns

Circle the correct options:

Can you help me to move the \_\_\_\_\_?

We bought some new \_\_\_\_\_ for the factory.

She wears a lot of \_\_\_\_\_.

She wears a lot of \_\_\_\_\_.

This car cost a lot of \_\_\_\_\_.

The price was ten thousand \_\_\_\_\_.

The \_\_\_\_\_ so bad that I didn't get home until eight.

There were too many slow-moving \_\_\_\_\_ on the road.

I love eating \_\_\_\_\_.

I love eating \_\_\_\_\_.

I have \_\_\_\_\_ good news to tell you!

We have had \_\_\_\_\_ good news recently.

How \_\_\_\_\_ luggage did you bring?

How \_\_\_\_\_ did you bring?

I'd like to order a couple of \_\_\_\_\_, please.

furnitures	furniture
equipments	equipment
jewelry	jewelries
rings	ring
moneys	money
dollars	dollar
traffic was	traffics were
vehicles	vehicle
fruits	fruit
banana	bananas
a	some
a lot of	many
much	many
much bag	many bags
coffees	coffee

## Part 5

# Container Words

We often make nouns countable by using them together with ‘container words’.

For example, we can’t say ‘two soaps’ but we can say ‘two bars of soap’.

The most common container word is ‘piece’; for instance, ‘a piece of news’.

Some uncountable nouns can be used with more than one container word:

A cup of coffee  
A jar of coffee.

More examples.

A slice of cheese

A slice of toast

A sheet of paper

A bar of soap

A bar of chocolate

A blade of grass.

A bolt of lightning.

A pinch of salt

A tube of toothpaste

A grain of sand

A packet of rice

A drop of water

A loaf of bread

A member of staff

A moment of time

A pint of milk

A herd of cattle

A piece of news

A piece of furniture

A piece of cake

A piece of chocolate

A piece of luck

A piece of jewelry

A piece of advice

## Exercise 4

Complete the phrases without looking back at the notes:

1 a \_\_\_\_\_ of cheese

2 a \_\_\_\_\_ of grass

3 a \_\_\_\_\_ of advice

4 a \_\_\_\_\_ of bread

5 a \_\_\_\_\_ of jewelry

6 a \_\_\_\_\_ of news

7 a \_\_\_\_\_ of sand

8 a \_\_\_\_\_ of toast

9 a \_\_\_\_\_ of chocolate

10 a \_\_\_\_\_ of staff

## Exercise 5

### Final exercise

Circle the correct option:

1. Which of these words is countable?
2. Which of these words is countable?
3. Which of these words is countable?
4. Can you pass me a \_\_\_\_\_ of paper?
5. I have so \_\_\_\_\_ homework to do.
6. Have you made \_\_\_\_\_ progress?
7. I need \_\_\_\_\_ advice.
8. Is \_\_\_\_\_ milk fresh?
9. Most of this food \_\_\_\_\_ tasty.
10. Let's order a couple of \_\_\_\_\_ and have a chat.
11. I bought some chewing \_\_\_\_\_.
12. I don't have enough \_\_\_\_\_ to finish this assignment.
13. I enjoyed all the \_\_\_\_\_ we went dancing together.
14. Which of these words is uncountable?
15. Which of these words is uncountable?
16. A \_\_\_\_\_ of cheese.
17. A \_\_\_\_\_ of soap.
18. I have \_\_\_\_\_ good news to tell you.
19. I can lend you \_\_\_\_\_ money if you need it.
20. I can lend you \_\_\_\_\_ dollars if you need some money.

chair	furniture
equipment	machine
rice	cookie
sheet	slice
much	many
many	any
an	some
this	these
is	are
coffees	coffee
gums	gum
time	times
time	times
garbage	can
flour	flower
bar	slice
slice	bar
some	a
a few	a little
a little	a few

## Part 6

**Answer key****Exercise 1**

Which of these words are uncountable?

Words in bold are uncountable:

- |   |                  |    |                |
|---|------------------|----|----------------|
| 1 | <u>methane</u>   | 9  | <u>mustard</u> |
| 2 | <u>advice</u>    | 10 | mouse          |
| 3 | <u>smoke</u>     | 11 | finger         |
| 4 | <u>wool</u>      | 12 | battery        |
| 5 | <u>meat</u>      | 13 | kid            |
| 6 | shoe             | 14 | <u>pasta</u>   |
| 7 | target           | 15 | cellphone      |
| 8 | <u>chocolate</u> |    |                |

**Exercise 2**

Sentences in bold are correct. Corrections are in brackets:

- |  |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
| 1 Can you pass a salt?                                     | (...the salt)           |
| 2 <b>Could you pass the salt?</b>                          |                         |
| 3 <b>This sugar is lovely.</b>                             |                         |
| 4 Can you pass me a meat?                                  | (...the meat/some meat) |
| 5 I have so many homeworks to do.                          | (homework)              |
| 6 Most of this information are correct.                    | (... is correct)        |
| 7 <b>Do you have any information that would be useful?</b> |                         |
| 8 <b>My work is difficult.</b>                             |                         |
| 9 These jam looks tasty.                                   | (This jam...)           |
| 10 This pasta taste great!                                 | (tastes)                |
| 11 <b>Can I borrow a little wool from you?</b>             |                         |
| 12 <b>We're having some great weather at the moment.</b>   |                         |
| 13 <b>Add lots of oil to the pan.</b>                      |                         |
| 14 I only have a few money left.                           | (...a little money)     |
| 15 Henry gave me a useful advice.                          | (...some useful advice) |
| 16 <b>My sister doesn't give me much advice.</b>           |                         |

## Exercise 3

Answers are in bold:

Can you help me to move the \_\_\_\_\_?  
 We bought some new \_\_\_\_\_ for the factory.  
 She wears a lot of \_\_\_\_\_.  
 She wears a lot of \_\_\_\_\_.  
 This car cost a lot of \_\_\_\_\_.  
 The price was ten thousand \_\_\_\_\_.  
 The \_\_\_\_\_ so bad that I didn't get home until eight.  
 There were too many slow-moving \_\_\_\_\_ on the road.  
 I love eating \_\_\_\_\_.  
 I love eating \_\_\_\_\_.  
 I have \_\_\_\_\_ good news to tell you!  
 We have had \_\_\_\_\_ good news recently.  
 How \_\_\_\_\_ luggage did you bring?  
 How \_\_\_\_\_ did you bring?  
 I'd like to order a couple of \_\_\_\_\_, please.

furnitures	<b><u>furniture</u></b>
equipments	<b><u>equipment</u></b>
<b><u>jewelry</u></b>	jewelries
<b><u>rings</u></b>	ring
moneys	<b><u>money</u></b>
<b><u>dollars</u></b>	dollar
<b><u>traffic was</u></b>	traffics were
<b><u>vehicles</u></b>	vehicle
fruits	<b><u>fruit</u></b>
banana	<b><u>bananas</u></b>
a	<b><u>some</u></b>
<b><u>a lot of</u></b>	many
<b><u>much</u></b>	many
much bag	<b><u>many bags</u></b>
<b><u>coffees</u></b>	coffee

## Exercise 4

Complete the phrases:

1 a _____ of cheese	<b>slice/piece/lump</b>
2 a _____ of grass	<b>blade</b>
3 a _____ of advice	<b>piece/bit/word</b>
4 a _____ of bread	<b>slice/piece/loaf</b>
5 a _____ of jewelry	<b>piece</b>
6 a _____ of news	<b>piece/bit</b>
7 a _____ of sand	<b>grain</b>
8 a _____ of toast	<b>slice/piece/bit</b>
9 a _____ of chocolate	<b>bar/piece</b>
10 a _____ of staff	<b>member</b>

## Exercise 5

1. Which of these words is countable? **chair**
2. Which of these words is countable? **machine**
3. Which of these words is countable? **cookie**
4. Can you pass me a \_\_\_\_\_ of paper? **sheet**
5. I have so \_\_\_\_\_ homework to do. **much**
6. Have you made \_\_\_\_\_ progress? **any**
7. I need \_\_\_\_\_ advice. **some**
8. Is \_\_\_\_\_ milk fresh? **this**
9. Most of this food \_\_\_\_\_ tasty. **is**
10. Let's order a couple of \_\_\_\_\_ and have a chat. **coffees**
11. I bought some chewing \_\_\_\_\_. **gum**
12. I don't have enough \_\_\_\_\_ to finish this assignment. **time**
13. I enjoyed all the \_\_\_\_\_ we went dancing together. **times**
14. Which of these words is uncountable? **garbage**
15. Which of these words is uncountable? **flour**
16. A \_\_\_\_\_ of cheese. **slice**
17. A \_\_\_\_\_ of soap. **bar**
18. I have \_\_\_\_\_ good news to tell you. **some**
19. I can lend you \_\_\_\_\_ money if you need it. **a little**
20. I can lend you \_\_\_\_\_ dollars if you need some money. **a few**

## A Final Word

If you found these materials useful, you'll be happy to know there are many more great EFL resources at RoadtoGrammar.com, including an online version of everything here, at:

[www.roadtogrammar.com/uncountablenouns](http://www.roadtogrammar.com/uncountablenouns)

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