



FREE RESOURCE · GRAMMAR

Countable and uncountable nouns

Countable nouns can be counted one by one, so they have a plural: one car, two cars. Uncountable nouns name things you cannot count separately, such as water, advice and information. They have no plural form and take a singular verb. Use many and fewer with countable nouns, and much and less with uncountable nouns.

What to know

The basic difference

A countable noun is a thing you can count as separate units: a student, three students, a problem, many problems. It has a singular and a plural form. You can use a or an with the singular: a city, an idea.

- *a problem, two problems · information (not informations)*
- *a suggestion, many suggestions · advice (not advices)*

Words that go with each type

Some quantity words work only with one type. With countable nouns, use a, an, many, a few, fewer and several. With uncountable nouns, use much, a little, less and a great deal of. Some, any, a lot of, enough and no work with both.

- Countable: a few, many, several, fewer, a number of
- Uncountable: a little, much, less, a great deal of, an amount of
- Both: some, any, a lot of, enough, no

Uncountable nouns that surprise learners

Many common uncountable nouns are countable in other languages, and this causes frequent errors in IELTS. The most common are information, advice, research, knowledge, equipment, furniture, luggage, traffic, news, progress, evidence, homework, accommodation and work.

Agreement and articles

Uncountable nouns take a singular verb: The research shows, The equipment is new, Traffic has increased. Do not add -s to make a plural. Say two pieces of equipment, not two equipments.

Three quick tests

When you meet a noun, try these tests. Can you put a number in front of it without a unit word? Two cars works, but two advices does not. Can you say a before it? A student works, but a furniture does not. Can you ask how many? How many ideas works, but how many traffic does not.

Exercises

1. I need some _____ about courses in Canada.
 - a. informations
 - b. information
 - c. a information

2. There _____ too much traffic in the city centre.
- a. is
 - b. are
 - c. were
3. How _____ homework do you get each week?
- a. few
 - b. much
 - c. many
4. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) My teacher (2) gave me (3) an advice (4) about my essay.
5. Begin with She. Put the words in order (one or more words are not needed): advices / useful / gave / me / some / advice. / She
6. Correct this: *The furnitures in my flat are old.*
7. There are _____ people in the queue than yesterday.
- a. fewer
 - b. little
 - c. less
8. Scientists have done a lot of _____ on sleep.
- a. a research
 - b. research
 - c. researches
9. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) I took (2) three luggages (3) on the plane.
10. Would you like _____ coffee?
- a. some
 - b. many
 - c. few

Practise online, free: hear every example and check your answers at www.ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/countable-and-uncountable-nouns/practice/

IELTS tip. Check every noun that follows many, much, a lot of, fewer or less in your Writing, and check that information, advice, research, equipment and traffic have no plural s. In Speaking, say a piece of advice or some information to keep your sentences accurate.

FOR TEACHERS · GRAMMAR

Countable and uncountable nouns

AIM	Learners classify nouns as countable or uncountable and use the right quantity words, articles and verbs with each.
TIME	30 minutes
LEVEL	B1 to B2 (IELTS 5 to 6.5)
MATERIALS	This worksheet, one copy per learner; the free online practice for the audio

Warm-up

Show a picture of a shopping basket with items such as rice, apples, bread and eggs. Ask learners which items they can count.

Lesson steps

1. Elicit the difference using the basket and write two lists on the board, then add the uncountable nouns that cause problems (information, advice, equipment).
2. Learners sort twenty nouns into three groups: countable, uncountable and both. Discuss disagreements and check a dictionary.
3. Pair work: learners write six sentences using much, many, fewer, less, a piece of and a few, each with one correct noun.
4. Error fixing: show sentences with informations, advices and many traffic and have learners say the right form aloud.

Extension

Learners rewrite a short paragraph from a Task 2 essay in which every uncountable noun was wrongly made plural.

Answer key

1. b) information. Information is uncountable, so it has no plural and no a.
2. a) is. Traffic is uncountable and takes a singular verb. The present tense form is is.
3. b) much. Homework is uncountable, so we use how much.
4. Part 3: *an advice* → **some advice**. Advice is uncountable, so it cannot have an or a plural.
5. She gave me some useful advice. Advice stays singular and comes after the adjective useful.
6. The furniture in my flat is old. Furniture is uncountable, so it has no plural and takes a singular verb.
7. a) fewer. People is countable, so we use fewer.
8. b) research. Research is uncountable when it means studies in general.

9. Part 2: *three luggages* → **three bags**. Luggage is uncountable, so use a countable word like bags with a number.

10. a) some. Coffee here is uncountable, and some is used in offers.

Questions learners often ask

What are countable and uncountable nouns? Countable nouns can be counted and have a plural, such as book and books. Uncountable nouns cannot be counted and have no plural, such as information and water.

Is news singular or plural? News is singular, so it takes a singular verb: The news is good.

Can some nouns be both? Yes, a few can, often with different meanings. Hair, time and glass are examples. Check a learner dictionary if you are not sure.

Do I use fewer or less? Use fewer with countable nouns and less with uncountable nouns.

Sources

- Swan, M. (2016). Practical English Usage (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Carter, R. and McCarthy, M. (2006). Cambridge Grammar of English. Cambridge University Press.

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