ESOL – Countable and uncountable nouns

This companion document covers the same learning as the interactive session, but in a different way so as to be more accessible for learners with sight impairments. Because of this, it does not follow a slide structure.

Welcome

Welcome to this session on imperatives.

By the end of this session, you will know:

* What countable and uncountable nouns are
* How to use countable nouns
* How to use uncountable nouns

Types of nouns

Nouns are naming words. They name people, places or things.

There are two types of English nouns: countable nouns and uncountable nouns. We use different words with countable nouns and uncountable nouns.

When you learn a new noun, you should make a note of whether it is a countable noun or an uncountable noun.

What is a countable noun?

Countable nouns are nouns which can be counted. This means we can use them in singular and plural forms. There are many countable nouns. Here are some examples:

* Chair
* Sandwich
* Peanut
* Candle
* Egg
* Student
* Bottle
* Book
* Cup

Countable nouns – positive sentences

When making positive sentences with countable nouns, we use a, an, or some.

We use a or an, for singular countable nouns.

For example:

Can I have an apple?

We use some with plural countable nouns. Some refers to any number more than one.

For example:

I bought some pens.

Countable nouns – negative sentences

For negative sentences, we use a, an or any.

We use a or an for singular countable nouns.

For example:

There isn’t a car in the garage.

We use any with plural countable nouns. Any refers to any number more than one.

For example:

There aren’t any peppers in the fridge.

Countable nouns - questions

For questions about countable nouns, we use a, an, any or how many.

For example:

Can I have a pie?

Is there an orange in the bowl?

Are there any bottles on the shelf?

How many mugs do you need?

What are uncountable nouns?

Uncountable nouns cannot be counted. This means they have no plural.

There are many uncountable nouns. Let’s look at some examples:

* Money
* Sugar
* Salt
* Furniture
* Information
* Water
* Coffee
* Snow
* Grass

Uncountable nouns - questions

For questions about uncountable nouns, we use any or how much.

For example:

Is there any coffee?

How much milk do you need?

Uncountable nouns – using ‘some’

We always use a singular verb for uncountable nouns with some.

For example, we do NOT say:

There are some water in the kettle.

We DO say:

There is some water in the kettle.

Using ‘a lot’

We can use a lot of with both countable and uncountable nouns.

For example, with the countable noun pears:

There are a lot of pears in the supermarket.

For example, with the uncountable noun sugar:

There is a lot of sugar in this cake.

Knowledge checks

Test your knowledge on the questions below.

Question 1:

What word in the following sentence is a countable noun?

“I put an orange in your lunchbox.”

Answer: Orange is a singular countable noun.

Question 2:

The negative sentence below is missing a word. Do you think a, an, or any is more appropriate?

“I don’t have *[blank]* pen to write with!”

Answer: The correct sentence is: I don’t have a pen to write with!

Pen is a singular countable noun that does not start with a vowel, so we use a.

Question 3:

Which of the following are uncountable nouns?

Select all that apply.

1. Apple
2. Chair
3. Snow
4. Mango

Answer: b) and c) are uncountable nouns.

Question 4:

Read the sentences below and select those that are grammatically correct.

Select all that apply.

1. There are some research about that.
2. Did you buy any juice?
3. Did you buy how much juice?
4. There is some research about that.

Answer: b) and d) are both grammatically correct sentences.

Summary

Well done. You have completed this session on countable and uncountable nouns.

You should now know:

* What countable and uncountable nouns are
* How to use countable nouns
* How to use uncountable nouns

If you have any questions about anything covered in this session, please speak to your tutor for more help.