

<http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/grammar-reference/countable-uncountable-nouns-2>

<http://www.engvid.com/english-resource/countable-and-uncountable-nouns/>

<http://www.tesol-direct.com/guide-to-english-grammar/quantifiers>

Countable & Uncountable nouns (1)

Nouns can be countable or uncountable. When you learn a new noun you should make a note of whether it is countable or uncountable as we use different words with countables and uncountables.

Countable nouns

- *There is a cat in the garden.*
- *There are some birds in the trees.*

For positive sentences we can use **a/an** or **some** (with a plural verb form)

- *There isn't a dog in the garden.*
- *There aren't any birds in the tree.*

For negatives we can use **a/an** or **any** (with a plural verb form).

- *Is there an orange on the tree?*
- *Are there any chairs in the garden?*
- *How many chairs are there?*

In questions we use **a/an**, **any** or **how many**.

Uncountable nouns

- *There is some milk on the floor.*

Uncountable nouns have no plural. The verb form is singular and we use **some**.

- *Is there any sugar?*
- *How much wine is there?*

In questions we can use **any** or **how much**.

Other expressions of quantity

- *There are a lot of apples on the trees.*
- *There is a lot of snow on the road.*

A lot of can be used with both countable and uncountable nouns.

- *Bill Gates has much money.*

Notice that we don't usually use '**much**' or '**many**' in positive sentences. We use '**a lot of**'.

- *Bill Gates has a lot of money.*
- *There's a lot of juice but there isn't much milk.*
- *There are a lot of carrots but there aren't many potatoes.*

We use **not many** with countable nouns and **not much** with uncountable nouns.

Some nouns can be both countable and uncountable, depending on how they are used, and some nouns are commonly confused.

Countable & Uncountable nouns (2)

Some words can be both countable and uncountable depending on how they are used.

- *Would you like a chocolate?*
- *Would you like some chocolate?*

In a **box of chocolates**, the chocolates are countable and you can take **one**.

When you have a **bar of chocolate** the chocolate is uncountable and you can take **some**.

There are several other nouns that can be both countable and uncountable.

- *Can I have a glass of water, please?*
- *There's some broken glass on the pavement.*

'Glass' is one. Many foodstuffs can be countable or uncountable. Think about the difference between '**an ice cream**' and '**some ice cream**' and '**a coffee**' and '**some coffee**'

'few/a few' and 'little/a little'

We use **few** and **a few** with countable nouns and we use **little** and **a little** with uncountable nouns.

- *A few friends are coming round for dinner tonight.*
- *We've got a little time before our train leaves. Shall we go to a museum?*

A few and **a little** both mean '**some**'. They have a positive meaning.

- *I've got very few friends here. I feel really lonely.*
- *We've got very little time – hurry up or we'll miss the train.*

Few and **little** both mean '**almost none**'. They have a negative meaning.

Commonly confused words

- *I'd like an information about train times please*
- *I'd like some information about train times please.*

Although '**information**' is countable in many languages, it is uncountable in English.

- *Have you had any news from Pete?*
- *I haven't brought much luggage with me.*
- *Can you give me some advice please?*

As well as **information**, the following words are all uncountable: **news, luggage, advice, furniture, weather, travel.**

List of Uncountable Nouns (These are sample uncountable nouns only! There are many more.)

General

Homework, equipment, luggage, clothing, furniture, machinery, gold, silver, cotton, glass, jewelery, perfume, soap, paper, wood, petrol, baggage, hair, traffic

Food

Food, flour, meat, rice, cake, bread, ice cream, cheese, toast, pasta, spaghetti, butter, oil, honey, soup, fish, fruit, salt, tea, coffee

Subjects/Fields

Mathematics, economics, physics, ethics, civics, art, architecture, music, photography, grammar, chemistry, history, commerce, engineering, politics, sociology, psychology, vocabulary, archaeology, poetry

Abstract

Advice, help, fun, recreation, enjoyment, information, knowledge, news, patience, happiness, progress, confidence, courage, education, intelligence, space, energy, laughter, peace, pride

Sports

Golf, tennis, baseball, basketball, soccer, football, cricket, hockey, rugby, chess, poker, bridge

Additional notes on quantifiers

Quantifier	Singular nouns (C)	Plural nouns (C)	Uncountable nouns (U)
<i>all</i>	-	Yes	Yes
<i>any</i>	No, but see note.	Yes	Yes
<i>both</i>	*	Yes	*
<i>each</i>	Yes	-	-
<i>enough</i>	-	Yes	Yes
<i>every</i>	Yes	-	-
<i>few/a few/fewer</i>	-	Yes	-
<i>little/a little/less</i>	-	-	Yes
<i>lots of / a lot of</i>	-	Yes	Yes
<i>many</i>	-	Yes	-
<i>more</i>	-	Yes	Yes
<i>no</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>several</i>	-	Yes	-
<i>some</i>	-	Yes	Yes

Any

Any can be used before countable and uncountable nouns usually in *questions* and *negative* sentences:

- *Are you bringing **any** friends with you?*
- *Do you have **any** coffee?*
- *I can't remember **any** songs.*
- *He isn't taking **any** chances.*

If we stress the word *any* heavily when speaking, we are suggesting an unlimited choice from a range of things or an unrestricted quantity; in this case its use is not confined to just questions and negatives:

- *Help yourself to **any** sandwiches. (the choice is yours)*
- *Don't you like **any** Beatles song? (I can't believe you dislike them all)*
- *I can't see **any** difference. (nothing at all)*

Some

Some is usually thought of as the *positive* counterpart to *any* in many circumstances.

- *I'm bringing **some** friends with me.*
- *I have **some** coffee.*

Like *any* it is used before both C and U nouns, and means an indefinite quantity but not a large amount. The general rule given above for the use of *any* in negative sentences and questions does not always hold in requests and offers where we often use *some* to mean a small amount of a known quantity:

- *Would you like **some** cake? (here is the cake, do you want a piece of it?)*
- *Could I have **some** biscuits instead? (any would not be possible in this case)*

If we stress the word *some* in positive and negative sentences and in questions, we are suggesting a limited quantity or number of something:

- *I like **some** Beatles songs. (But certainly not all!)*
- *I can see **some** difference. (But not a lot!)*