Nouns—Countable & Noncountable

In English, some nouns are countable, and some nouns are noncountable. Simply put, you can add a number in front of a countable noun and you cannot add a number in front of a noncountable noun. For instance, you could accurately state that you had one bowl of rice, but you cannot accurately state that you had one rice.

Countable nouns may be preceded by a/an or one in the singular form. They also take a final s/es if the noun is plural.

- A table
- One table

Noncountable nouns are not preceded by a/an or one. Noncountable nouns have no plural form.

- Some furniture

Many nouns that are noncountable represent a whole made of many parts. For instance, the word furniture means a whole group of furniture pieces, like tables, chairs, sofas, and so on.

- I put sugar in my coffee.

The following is a short list of some nouns that are typically considered noncountable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstractions</th>
<th>advice, beauty, confidence, courage, education, energy, enjoyment, evidence, fun, grammar, happiness, health, help, homework, honesty, hospitality, importance, information, intelligence, justice, knowledge, laughter, luck, music, news, patience, peace, pride, progress, proof, recreation, significance, slang, sleep, space, time, truth, violence, vocabulary, wealth, work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>driving, studying, swimming, traveling, walking (and other gerunds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fields of Study</td>
<td>biology, chemistry, history, literature, mathematics, philosophy, psychology, sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluids</td>
<td>coffee, gasoline, milk, oil, tea, water</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gases</td>
<td>air, fog, hydrogen, oxygen, pollution, smog, steam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Phenomena</td>
<td>dew, electricity, fire, fog, gravity, hail, heat, humidity, lightning, rain, sleet, snow, thunder, wind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particles</td>
<td>chalk, dirt, dust, flour, grass, hair, sugar, wheat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>baseball, bridge, chess, football, poker, soccer, swimming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solids</td>
<td>bread, butter, cheese, cotton, glass, gold, iron, wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Groups Made Up of Similar Items</td>
<td>baggage, clothing, equipment, food, furniture, garbage, hardware, jewelry, junk, money/cash/change, stuff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using Articles
In English, there are three articles—*a*, *an*, *the*.

Use *the* if you have enough information to specifically identify the noun.

**Count**
- Turn on *the* air conditioner.

**Noncountable**
- *The* furniture at that store is reasonably priced.

Use *a* or *an* if the noun refers to one item and if it is singular but not specific. Don’t use *a* or *an* with plural or noncountable nouns.

**Count**
- Bring *a* pen to work. You will write *an* essay about your day.

Using Quantifiers
Use a quantifier like *some*, *many*, or *enough* if the noun represents an unspecified amount of something or if the amount is more than one but not all items in a category.

**Count (Plural)**
- Mary showed us *some* pictures of Seattle.

- *Many* birds return to the same nest every year.

**Noncountable**
- We didn’t get *enough* rain this year.

Using Nouns without Articles
Sometimes you don’t need an article at all. If the noun represents all the items in a category or if the noun represents a category in general, you don’t need an article.

**Count (Plural)**
- Students can use the printer for free.

**Noncountable**
- Air is a natural resource.

Works Cited