



## Help With: Countable and Uncountable Nouns

**Countable** nouns refer to things that exist as separate and distinct individual units.

**Uncountable** nouns refer to things that can't be counted because they are thought of as wholes that can't be separated. They often refer to ideas or have a collective meaning (for example, *furniture*). Liquids are usually uncountable nouns. Some animals are traditionally uncountable.

anger	stuff	weather
furniture	education	advice
staff	information	deer
wine	fish	snow
corn	beer	water

Think of the batter from which a cake is made. Before you put the batter into the oven, it can't be divided into parts because it's a liquid. Once it has been baked, it becomes solid enough to be cut into pieces. Uncountable nouns are like cake batter; count nouns are like pieces of cake.

Most countable nouns pluralize with *-s*. Uncountable nouns don't pluralize at all.

### Countable

*The talks will take place in the Greystone building.* (refers to a number of specific talks)

### Uncountable

*Light travels faster than sound.* (refers to light and sound as general concepts)

Sometimes a usually uncountable noun can be counted if you are comparing groups.

*There are several French wines to choose from.*

*The fruits and vegetables of southeast Asia look and smell different but are delicious.*

*The general had many staffs working for him.*

### Articles

Uncountable nouns usually do not need articles unless you are specifying a particular quantity.

*Milk in North America usually comes from cows.* (Milk in general)

*Betty spilled the milk I bought on the floor.* (a specific quantity of milk)

### Exceptions

There are some exceptions and variations which are usually slang usages or set expressions.

*Tom, can you bring three coffees?* ("cups of" is meant but omitted because it's obvious)

*The rains came early this season.*