

UNIT 69

Uncountable nouns (gold, music, advice etc.)

Nouns can be *countable* or *uncountable*. For *countable* nouns see Unit 70.

a) *Uncountable* nouns are, for example:

gold music blood excitement

Uncountable nouns are things we cannot count. They have no plural. You cannot say 'musics', 'bloods' or 'excitements'.

b) Before uncountable nouns you can say **the/some/any/much/this/his** etc.:

the music some gold much excitement his blood

But you cannot use **a/an** before an uncountable noun. So you cannot say 'a music', 'an excitement' or 'a blood'.

You can also use uncountable nouns alone, with no article (see Unit 74):

– This ring is made of **gold**. – **Blood** is red.

c) Many nouns can be used as countable or as uncountable nouns. Usually there is a difference in meaning. For example:

paper I bought a **paper**. (= a newspaper – *countable*)

I bought some **paper**. (= material for writing on – *uncountable*)

hair There's a **hair** in my soup! (= one single hair – *countable*)

She has beautiful **hair**. (= hair on her head – *uncountable*)

experience We had many interesting **experiences** during our holiday. (= things that happened to us – *countable*)

You need **experience** for this job. (= knowledge of something because you have done it before – *uncountable*)

d) Some nouns are usually uncountable in English but often countable in other languages. Here are the most important of these:

accommodation	behaviour	furniture	news	scenery	trouble
advice	bread	information	permission	traffic	weather
baggage	chaos	luggage	progress	travel	work

These nouns are *uncountable*, so (i) you cannot use **a/an** before them; and (ii) they cannot be plural:

- I'm looking for **accommodation**. (*not* 'an accommodation')
- I'm going to buy **some bread**. (*or* 'a loaf of bread'; *but not* 'a bread')
- Tom gave me **some good advice**. (*not* 'some good advices')
- Where are you going to put all your **furniture**? (*not* 'furnitures')

Remember that **news** is not plural:

- The **news** is very depressing today. (*not* 'The news are ...')

Do not use **travel** to mean **journey/trip**:

- We had a good **journey**. (*not* 'a good travel')

Note these pairs of countable (C) and uncountable (UNC) nouns:

- I'm looking for a **job**. (C) *but* I'm looking for **work**. (UNC)
- What a lovely view! (C) *but* What lovely **scenery**! (UNC)

UNIT 69 Exercises

69.1 Which of the underlined parts of these sentences is right?

Example: Sue was very helpful. She gave me some good advice / ~~advices~~. ('advice' is right)

- 1 Margaret has got very long black hair / hairs.
- 2 We had a very good weather / very good weather when we were on holiday.
- 3 Sorry I'm late. I had trouble / troubles with the car this morning.
- 4 I want something to read. I'm going to buy a / some paper.
- 5 I want to write some letters. I need a / some writing paper.
- 6 It's very difficult to find a work / job at the moment.
- 7 Bad news don't / doesn't make people happy.
- 8 Our travel / journey from London to Istanbul by train was very interesting.
- 9 The flat is empty. We haven't got any furnitures / furniture yet.
- 10 When the fire alarm rang, there was a complete chaos / complete chaos.
- 11 I had to buy a / some bread because I wanted to make some sandwiches.
- 12 After spending most of his life travelling round the world, he is now writing a book about his experience / experiences.

69.2 Now you have to complete these sentences using these words:

progress advice ~~accommodation~~ hair work experience
information paper permission

Example: We haven't got anywhere to live. We're looking for (some) accommodation.....

- 1 I don't think Ann will get the job. She hasn't got
- 2 They'll tell you all you want to know. They'll give you plenty of
- 3 You'll easily recognise Alan. He's got green
- 4 Carla's English has improved. She has made
- 5 I want to write down your address. Have you got ?
- 6 If you want to leave early, you have to ask for
- 7 George is unemployed at the moment. He is looking for
- 8 I didn't know what to do. So I asked Jack for

69.3 In this exercise you have to write what you would say in these situations. Each time begin in the way shown and use one of the words in section d of this unit.

Example: Your friends have just arrived at the station. You can't see any suitcases or bags.
You say: Have you got any luggage..... ?

- 1 You go into the tourist office. You want to know about places to see in the town. You say: I'd like
- 2 The weather is beautiful. You say: What
- 3 You are a pupil at school. You want your teacher to advise you about which examinations to take. You say: Can you give me
- 4 You want to watch the news on television but you don't know what time it is on. You ask your friend: What time
- 5 You are standing at the top of a mountain. You can see a very long way. It is beautiful. You say: What