

UNIT 70

Countable nouns with **a/an** and **some**

Nouns can be *countable* or *uncountable*. For *uncountable* nouns see Unit 69.

a) Countable nouns are, for example:

dog umbrella job suggestion girl

Countable nouns are things we can count. We can make them plural:

two dogs six jobs some girls many suggestions

b) Before singular countable nouns you can use **a/an**:

– That's a good suggestion.

– Do you need **an** umbrella?

You cannot use singular countable nouns alone (without **a/the/my** etc.):

– I'm looking for **a** job. (*not* 'I'm looking for job')

– Be careful of **the** dog. (*not* 'Be careful of dog')

– I've got a headache.

– Would you like a cigarette?

For **a/an** and **the** see Unit 71.

c) We often use **a/an** + noun when we say what something/someone is, or what something/someone is like:

– A dog is **an** animal.

– Tom is a very nice person.

– This is a really beautiful house.

– Jack has got a big nose.

– What a lovely dress!

Remember to use **a/an** for jobs:

– Tom's father is **a** doctor. (*not* 'Tom's father is doctor')

– I wouldn't like to be **an** English teacher.

In sentences like these, we use plural countable nouns alone (*not* with *some*):

– Tom's parents are very nice people.

– What awful shoes!

(*not* 'some very nice people')

– Dogs are **animals**.

– Ann has got **blue** eyes.

– Are most of your friends **students**?

d) We also use **some** with plural countable nouns. **Some** = **a number of / a few of** (but we don't know or say exactly how many):

– I've seen **some** good films recently. (*not* 'I've seen good films')

– **Some** friends of mine are coming to stay at the week-end.

Do not use **some** when you are talking about things in general:

– I love **bananas**. (*not* 'some bananas')

Sometimes you can use **some** or leave it out:

– There are (**some**) eggs in the fridge if you're hungry.

For **some** and **any** see Unit 84.

e) You have to use **some** when you mean *some but not all / not many etc.*

– **Some** children learn very quickly. (*but not all children*)

– **Some** policemen in Britain carry guns (*but most of them don't*)

For plural countable nouns see also Unit 74.

UNIT 70 Exercises

70.1 What are these things? Try and find out if you don't know.

Example: an ant? It's an insect. ants? bees? They are insects.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1 a cauliflower? It's | 5 Earth? Mars? Venus? Jupiter? They |
| 2 a pigeon? It | 6 the Rhine? the Nile? the Mississippi? |
| 3 a dandelion? | |
| 4 a skyscraper? | |

And who were these people?

Example: Beethoven? He was a composer. Beethoven? Bach? They were composers.

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 7 Pele? He was | 11 Kennedy? Johnson? Nixon? They |
| 8 Shakespeare? He | |
| 9 Einstein? | 12 Elvis Presley? John Lennon? |
| 10 Marilyn Monroe? | |

70.2 Now you have to read about someone's job and then write what his or her job is.

Example: Ron flies aeroplanes. He's a pilot.

- 1 Vera types letters etc. in an office. She is
- 2 Tim arranges people's holidays for them. He
- 3 Stella looks after patients in hospital. She
- 4 Mary teaches mathematics.
- 5 Martha directs films.
- 6 John translates what people are saying from one language into another so that they can understand each other.

70.3 Now you have to put in a/an or some or leave a space (without a word).

Examples: I've seen some good films recently. Have you got a headache?
Are most of your friends — students?

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 Have you got camera? | 11 You need visa to visit |
| 2 Would you like to be actor? | foreign countries, but not all of them. |
| 3 Bill's got big feet. | 12 I'm going shopping. I'm going to get |
| 4 Do you collect stamps? | new clothes. |
| 5 Tom always gives Ann flowers on her birthday. | 13 Jane is teacher. Her parents were |
| 6 Those are really nice trousers. Where did you get them? | teachers too. |
| 7 What beautiful garden! | 14 When we reached the city centre, |
| 8 What lovely children! | shops were still open but most of them were already closed. |
| 9 birds, for example the penguin, cannot fly. | 15 Do you enjoy going to |
| 10 Jack has got very long legs, so he's fast runner. | concerts? |
| | 16 When I was child, I used to be very shy. |