



NOUNS

As we learned in elementary school, a noun names a person, a place, a thing, or an idea. Nouns can have suffixes such as the *-s* in *cats* or the *-’s* in *cat’s*. However, nouns can also take on endings that may be more familiar to you for other word classes, such as the *-ing* in *fishing*. Be sure to look at both the form and function of a word before you determine whether it is a noun.

2a

Singular or plural nouns

Singular nouns signify one person, place, thing, or idea.

Singular nouns → student, classroom, desk, theory

Plural nouns represent more than one person, place, thing, or idea.

Plural nouns → students, classrooms, desks, theories

Only count nouns can be pluralized (see 2c). Thus, the word *happiness* cannot be made plural.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many languages add endings to words (called inflections) to change the word's form in a sentence. English has eight inflections, such as adding *-s* to make nouns plural, *-ed* for past tense verbs, or *-er* and *-est* for comparative and superlative adjectives. But many languages, including Russian and German, are highly inflected and require specific endings for all parts of speech depending on number (singular or plural), grammatical gender (male, female, or neuter), and its function in the sentence (subject, object, indirect object, possessive, etc.).



2b

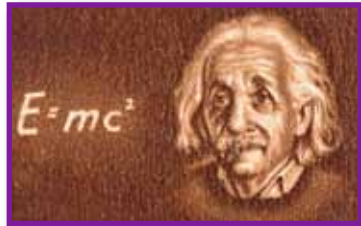
Common or proper nouns

Common nouns name a general person, place, thing, or idea.

Common nouns → student, classroom, desk, theory

Proper nouns name a specific person, place, thing, or idea. Capital letters are used to identify proper nouns.

Proper nouns → Harry Potter, Biology Lab, Information Desk, Albert Einstein, Theory of Relativity



2c

Count or non-count nouns

Count nouns indicate that a person, place, thing, or idea can be counted. Only count nouns can take plural forms.

→ I have only **one sign** left to put up.

→ **Many theories** exist about why honeybees are dying out.

Non-count nouns indicate that certain things or abstract ideas cannot be counted.

→ I have only my **patience** to lose.

→ **Water** is all over the floor.

Some nouns can have both a count and non-count use, and this type of usage is continuing to grow, especially when non-count nouns are used in a type of classification system.

Non-count → It will be easier to analyze nouns when you have more **experience**.

Count → My **experiences** in the past have not been happy ones.

Non-count → I usually have **beer** or **wine** with my dinner.

Count → The grocery store is now stocking ten **wines** and twenty **beers**.

2d

Concrete or abstract nouns

Concrete nouns name things that are tangible and can be seen, heard, tasted, touched, or smelled.

Concrete nouns → student, Harry, classroom, Biology Lab, desk, Information Desk

Abstract nouns name things that are not tangible or something that is an idea, condition, or feeling.

Abstract nouns → theory, Theory of Relativity, grief, hope

2e

Possessive nouns

Possessive nouns usually signify ownership but can also mark a state of belonging.

ownership → Jane's sign, the boy's desk

state of belonging → the sign's color, the desk's legs

Add *-s* if the noun does not end in *-s*.

→ Jane's sign, the boy's desk

Add *-s* if the noun is singular and ends in *-s* or an *s* sound.

→ Jani's sign, Giles's desk

Add only an apostrophe if the noun is plural and ends in *-s*.

→ the boys' desk, the Smiths' house

When you are using proper nouns and want to show that something is jointly owned, mark only the last noun with the appropriate punctuation.

→ Jane and John's desk, Jane and Giles's desk

When you are using proper nouns and want to show that each individual has ownership, mark each noun with the appropriate punctuation.

→ Jane's and John's desks, Jane's and Giles's desks

EXERCISE 1

Directions: Change the description on the left to one that includes the possessive form of the noun.

Example: That book belongs to Jane. → That is Jane's book.

1. That song was written by Big Boi and Kanye West. → *That was _____ song.*
2. The cookies are made by Mrs. Fields. → *I enjoy _____ cookies.*
3. Please tell us two weeks before you resign. → *Please give us _____ notice.*
4. The profits on my investments are varied. → *My _____ profits are varied.*
5. The dog that ate my homework belongs to the Jones family. → *The _____ dog ate my homework.*

2f

Collective nouns

Collective nouns indicate a group or unit and are usually viewed as singular when they emphasize the group as a unit.

- The **audience** is happy to see signs of life behind the curtain.
- I saw my neighbor's **family** drive by with its luggage piled high on top of the car.

If you want to highlight the individuals of a group, then some collective nouns may be treated as plural.

- The **audience** are happy that each of their chairs is draped with velvet.
- I saw my neighbor's **family** drive by, each of them smiling widely.

EXERCISE 2

Directions: Indicate whether the underlined nouns in these sentences are common or proper, concrete or abstract, and count or non-count.

Example: Falling leaves are a good indicator that winter is around the corner.

Answer: common, concrete, count

1. In the depths of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer. –Albert Camus
2. If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant. – Anne Bradstreet
3. One kind word can warm three winter months. – Japanese proverb
4. Winter is the time for comfort—it is the time for home. – Edith Sitwell
5. February is merely as long as is needed to pass the time until March. – J.R. Stockton



What is wrong with this picture?

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