

Countable vs. Uncountable Nouns

Countable nouns are those that can be counted (one tomato, two tomatoes, etc.)

Uncountable nouns are those that cannot be counted (tea, coffee, etc.)

Uncountable nouns take a **singular** verb and are not used with *a/an*.

Groups of uncountable nouns include:

- ◆ Mass nouns (milk, sugar, honey, bread, water, wine, etc.)
- ◆ Sports (football, basketball)
- ◆ Natural phenomena (rain, snow)
- ◆ Collective nouns (money, work, homework, food, medicine, time, weather, hair, furniture, luggage)
- ◆ Certain other nouns (accommodation, help, luck, evidence, information, advice, fun, etc.)

SOME vs. ANY

Some and **any** are used with **uncountable** and **plural countable** nouns.

Some is used in **affirmative** sentences:

1. There is **some** milk left in the fridge.
2. There are **some** plates on the table.

Some is also used in **interrogative** sentences when we expect a positive answer, for example when we make an offer or request:

Would you like **some** coffee?

Any is used in **interrogative** and **negative** sentences:

1. Have you made **any** new friends lately?
2. There isn't **any** accommodation available at the moment.

A FEW vs. A LITTLE

A few is used with **plural countable** nouns. **A little** is used with **uncountable** nouns.

A few means "not many, but enough":

We have **a few** tomatoes. We can make a tomato soup.

A little means "not much, but enough":

There is **a little** coffee left. Would you like another cup?

A LOT OF/LOTS OF vs. MUCH vs. MANY

A lot of/lots of are used with both plural countable and uncountable nouns. They are normally used in **affirmative** sentences:

We've got **a lot of** questions to ask our English teacher next time we see her.

I've got **a lot of** work to do in the evening.

Much and **many** are used in **negative** and **interrogative** sentences.

Much is used with **uncountable** nouns and **many** is used with **plural countable** nouns:

Nowadays, students don't have **much** spare time.

He hasn't got **many** relatives.

How much and **How many** are used in questions and negative sentences:

How much + UNCOUNTABLE nouns

How many + PLURAL COUNTABLE nouns

How much sugar do you take?
How many friends have you got?

Note: Some nouns can be used as both countable and uncountable. However, they have different meanings in each case. Study the following:

- a. How much **time** do we have until the end of the test?
- b. How many **times** have you been to the USA?

- a. She's got long dark **hair**.
- b. All areas of the skin are in fact covered in tiny **hairs**.

- a. I had a lot of **work** to do last night.
- b. Do you have a complete list of the **works** of Shakespeare?

Some uncountable nouns can be made countable if we use any of the following words:

glass, bottle, cup, loaf, jar, etc.

I'd like a glass of wine / a cup of coffee, please.

I'd like two loaves of bread and a bottle of milk, please.

Also, we can use the expression "a piece of" with uncountable nouns, such as information, advice, etc. For example:

My father gave me a very valuable piece of advice the other day.

I came across a rather interesting piece of information quite by accident.