
Nouns

A noun is a naming word. It is the name of a person, place, thing, animal, concept, river etc. Nouns are divided into five main kinds.

1. Common Noun:

A name given in common to every person or thing of the same class is called a common noun.

Examples:

- Hyderabad is a big city.
- She is a good girl.

2. Proper Noun:

The name of a particular person or place is called a Proper Noun.

Examples:

- King Solomon was a wise king.
- Kalidas was a great poet.

3. Collective Noun:

It is the name of a number of persons or things taken together and spoken of as a whole.

Examples:

- A herd of cattle is grazing in the field.
- A bunch of keys is on the table.

4. Abstract Noun:

The name of a quality, a state of mind or a stage of life is called an Abstract noun.

Examples:

- Kindness is a virtue.
- Childhood is the happiest stage of one's life.

5. Material Noun:

All those nouns, which are used to refer to metals and materials, are called Material Nouns.

Examples:

- This chain is made of gold.
- This house is built of brick.

In the above examples 'gold' and 'brick' are material nouns.

Nouns are further classified into two types depending on whether they can be counted or not.

I. Countable nouns:

Countable nouns are nouns that we can count: for eg. boy - one boy, two boys, three boys, etc.

Note: The classes of nouns known as 'common nouns' (boy, table, etc.) and 'collective nouns' (flock, regiment, crowd, troop, etc.) can be included in the larger class of countable nouns.

II. Uncountable Nouns:

(also called non-count nouns)

Uncountable nouns (NCNs) name things which we cannot count or usually don't count. The classes of nouns known as Material nouns and abstract nouns can be included in this category.

Uncountable nouns fall into the following groups:

- (a) Things which are considered in mass or quantity and not in numbers: sugar, sand, hair, dust etc.
- (b) Materials: wood, cloth, silver, gold, iron, etc.
- (c) Liquids: water, milk, oil, ink, honey, etc.
- (d) Gases: steam, mist, nitrogen, air, etc.
- (e) Natural phenomena: heat, cold, electricity, lightning, etc.
- (f) Abstract nouns: stages of life, states of mind, qualities, processes, actions, ideas, etc.:
courage, happiness, freedom, attention, childhood, honesty, enjoyment.

Note: A number of words used to refer to qualities, states, actions, etc, are however countable. These may be considered exceptions.

Examples: joys, sorrows, dreams, miseries, etc.

(g) Branches of learning: Economics, Mathematics, Politics etc.

Note: There are some uncountable nouns which we refer to in parts. When we do so, we use them with expressions such as a piece of, a grain of, a kilo of, etc. Here is a list of such expressions:

a piece of chalk	a piece of information
a cake of soap	a piece of furniture
a block of ice	a loaf of bread
a piece of advice	a log of wood etc.

These expressions have their plural forms: pieces of chalk, cakes of soap, etc.

Proper Nouns are not categorised either as Countable Nouns or as Uncountable Nouns.

Now study carefully some rules related to the correct use of nouns:

Rule 1:

A proper noun becomes a common noun when it is used in the plural form, or when an article is placed before it.

Examples:

There are five Gandhis in our college.

Vijay Kumar is the Milton of your college.

Kalidas is the Shakespeare of India.

Rule 2:

A collective noun takes a singular verb when the whole group is considered as one unit.

Examples:

The committee consists of five members.

The family living next door has come from Chennai.

Note: If we refer to the members of the committee or family separately, the collective noun takes a plural verb, but it (the collective noun) remains singular in form, for eg: The committee have taken their seats.

Rule 3:

An abstract noun can also be used as a common noun by placing an article before it.

Example:

Rajani is a beauty (a beautiful girl).

Rule 4:

An abstract noun can also be used in the sense of a collective noun. When an abstract noun is used as a collective noun it takes a plural verb.

Examples:

Youth are the pillars of the nation. (collective noun)

Rule 5:

When a material noun denotes a mass of matter, it is not used in the plural form.

Examples:

Their house is built of bricks and stones. (incorrect)

Their house is built of brick and stone. (correct)

Rule 6:

Some nouns have the same form for the plural as well as for the singular. The following are some nouns that belong to this category.

Examples:

sheep, species, deer, aircraft, offspring, yoke, space craft, salmon etc.

Rule 7:

Some nouns are used in the singular only. The following are some nouns that belong to this category.

Examples:

advice, corn, grain, justice, clothing, information, poetry, scenery, machinery, hair etc.

Note: Advice is the noun form and Advise is the verb form.

The advice of the doctor is that I should not smoke. (noun)

The doctor advised me not to smoke. (verb)

Similarly, Practice is noun and Practise is verb.

Rule 8:

There are some nouns which are used only in the plural form.

Examples:

scissors	shears	spectacles
trousers	pantaloons	shorts
bowels	intestines	biceps
genitals	gymnastics	premises
proceeds	riches	thanks
nuptials	outskirts	gallows
doldrums	earnings	

Rule 9:

Some nouns are apparently plural in form but are singular in use.

Examples:

news, economics, physics, measles, mumps, ethics.

Note: summons is singular and summonses is plural.

Rule 10:

The following nouns are always used in plural.

Examples:

cattle, police, people, vermin, poultry.

Rule 11:

When a plural noun denotes a specific amount, length, weight, quantity, etc. considered as a whole, the verb must be in the singular form.

Examples:

Ten thousand rupees is a large amount.

Six kilometres is not a long distance for a runner like you.

Rule 12:

Inanimate objects (lifeless objects) which are remarkable for beauty, gentleness, gracefulness, tenderness, weakness, and so on, are treated as feminine gender.

Examples:

the moon, the earth, spring, virtue, peace, charity, fame, nature, hope, justice, mercy, pity, fortune, truth, victory, defeat, modesty, liberty etc.

Note: Poets refer to them as feminine gender.

Rule 13:

Inanimate things which are known for strength, courage, violence, superiority, and so forth, are treated as masculine.

Examples:

the sun, death, summer, winter, war, anger, fear, thunder etc.

Note: The possessive case of nouns is formed when we put 's to the noun (apostrophe s)

Example:

- The girl's dress.
- The boy's pen

2. The possessive case is used with the nouns of living things but not with inanimate objects.

- Table's leg (incorrect)
- Leg of the table (correct)

3. The possessive is used with the names of personified objects.

- Death's icy hands

Rule 14:

When the noun is plural, and ends in s; the possessive case is formed by adding only an apostrophe (after s).

Examples:

- Girls' hostel
- Birds' nests

Rule 15:

When the noun is plural but does not end in s, the possessive case is formed by adding 's.

Examples:

- Men's club
- Children's park
- Women's day

Rule 16:

When a noun or a title consists of several words, the possessive case is formed by adding 's to the last word.

Examples:

- The Prime Minister of India's speech.
- The king of Bhutan's visit to India.....

Rule 17:

When two or more proper nouns are joined by 'and', and a common possession is meant, the possessive case will be formed by adding ('s) to the last noun.

Examples:

Amar and Kumar's house is really beautiful.

Note: This sentence denotes that the house belongs to both Amar and Kumar.

Rule 18:

When there are two nouns in apposition, the possessive case will be formed by adding ('s) to the second noun.

Examples:

- (i) Penicillin, Flemming's discovery, has saved the lives of many people.
- (ii) Mohan, the professor's son, is very intelligent.

Rule 19:

The possessive case of a compound noun will be formed by adding ('s) to the last word.

Examples:

Sister-in-law's house.

Commander-in-chief 's office.

Rule 20:

If the last syllable of a singular noun ends in '-s' or '-ce' and the noun is followed by the word "sake", the possessive case of the noun will be formed by adding (') only. However, modern day English accepts the use of 's' after apostrophe as the word is pronounced so – eg – goodness's sake.

Examples:

for goodness' sake, for justice' sake.

for conscience' sake, for Jesus' sake.