

Nouns and Determiners

The purpose of this resource is to review the types of nouns and the function of determiners.

Nouns are words that name persons, places, things, or concepts.

- In English, nouns serve as subjects of sentences, as complements to subjects of sentences, and as objects.

There are two basic types of nouns: proper and common:

- Proper nouns name specific persons, places, things, or concepts and are capitalized.
 1. Person: Bill Clinton
 2. Places: Arkansas River 3. Things: Statue of Liberty
 4. Concept: Buddhism.
- Common nouns name general classes or categories of persons, places, things, or concepts and are not capitalized unless they begin a sentence:
 1. Persons: People, boys, girls, women, men
 2. Places: City, town, country, store
 3. Things: Cars, trees, dogs, buildings universities
 4. Concepts: Religion, politics, education, freedom
- Common nouns are further divided into four groups: *Collective*, *concrete nouns*, *abstract nouns*, *count nouns* and *non-count or mass nouns*.
 1. *Collective nouns* refer to a group: jury, flock, herd, team, audience, and faculty. Collective nouns are singular in form but plural in meaning.
 2. *Concrete nouns* refer to those nouns that can be detected by the five senses (paper, perfume, nail, grease, etc.). If you can see it, hear it, smell it, feel it, or taste it, then it is a concrete noun.
 3. *Count nouns* are concrete nouns that identify things that can be separated into countable units (chairs, envelops, computers, printers, pens, folders, people). These nouns can be either singular or plural. Every singular count noun must be preceded by a determiner¹; furthermore, you can place an adjective between the determiner and the noun.
 4. *Non-count or Mass nouns* are nouns that identify things that cannot be separated into countable units (water, air, electricity, mud, oil, gas).
 5. *Abstract nouns* refer to ideas, qualities, or concepts that cannot be discerned by the five senses (loyalty, love, devotion, pride, and valor).

Note: While we can count electricity, oil, and water through kilowatts of electricity, gallons of oil, and gallons of water, counting becomes inappropriate when we are referring to these nouns in a general way. Mass nouns are always common nouns and never proper nouns.

The distinction between whether a noun is a count or mass noun is important in many ways:

1. Determines the form of the noun to use (singular or plural).
2. The kind of article that precedes it (an, an, the, or no article).
3. The kind of limiting adjective it requires (fewer or less, and much or many).

4. Whether to use a plural or singular verb and pronoun form.

Determiners are words that identify or quantify a noun, such as *this*, *all*, *his*, etc. Determiners express the reference of a noun, or noun-phrase in its context. Determiners point to the noun and situate it through placement. *This* cat has yellow fur. Note how *this* tells the reader which cat. *Your* hair is shinny. Again, *your* tells us whose hair, *your* hair. *Both* men are learning to dance. Again, *men* is a mass noun, but when you quantify it with *both*, you are

narrowing the possibilities from the collective *men* to both men of a certain group that is either understood or is pointed out in the preceding information or will come out in the following information.

Every count noun must be preceded by a determiner.

1. Determiners can be articles like *a*, *an*, *the*
2. Demonstrative adjectives like *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*
3. A possessive adjective like *my*, *your*, *her*, *his*, *its*, *their*
4. Qualifier of counting such as *one*, *two*, *several*, *many*, *a few*, *a lot*, *some*, *no*
5. Possessive noun and noun phrases: *John's paper*