

A noun is a word or group of words that names or identifies a person, place, or thing. A thing can refer to either a tangible object or even something intangible such as a quality, concept, or activity.

The highlighted words in each of the following sentences are examples of nouns.

1. The **psychologist** was invited to speak at a conference on eating disorders. (person)
2. Our trip included a two-day visit to **Prince Edward Island**. (place)
3. My **desk** was cluttered with miscellaneous pieces of junk. (object)
4. Mark was admired for his **beauty**. (quality)
5. Many people associate **romance** with candlelit dinners and walks on the beach. (concept)
6. Jennifer thinks **snowboarding** is dangerous. (activity)

The highlighted words in the following sentences show how nouns perform various functions in a sentence:

1. The **employee** e-mailed the memo.
The noun *employee* functions as the subject of the sentence.
2. The employee e-mailed the **memo**.
The noun *memo* functions as the direct object of the sentence.
3. The employee e-mailed his **supervisor** the memo.
The noun *supervisor* functions as the indirect object of the sentence.
4. The employee e-mailed the memo to his **supervisor**.
The noun *supervisor* functions as the object of the preposition.
5. The employee is a **consultant**.
The noun *consultant* functions as the subject complement.

Countable and Uncountable Nouns

Nouns can also be classified as either **countable** or **uncountable** nouns.

Countable nouns name things or persons that can be counted. They have both singular and plural forms. A plural countable noun must agree with a plural verb in a sentence.

The following sentences use plural countable nouns as subjects:

1. The **players** were not prepared for the level of skill demonstrated by their opponents.
2. The **categories** list the most important qualifications.

Uncountable nouns name things or persons that cannot be counted. These words do **not** have a plural form. They are **never** used with *a* or *an*, and they are used with a third-person singular verb. The following sentences use singular uncountable nouns as subjects:

1. The **furniture** was moved from the living room to the basement.
2. The **confidence** of the hikers grows as they near the peak of the mountain.

Some uncountable nouns become countable nouns, depending on their use in different contexts. The following pair of sentences shows how an uncountable noun can become a countable noun (note the change from singular to plural form):

1. **Chocolate** is my favourite food.
2. **Chocolates** were left on my pillow.

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns name groups of things, animals, or persons. Even though collective nouns may account for the individual parts of the group, collective nouns identify the groups as whole units. Consider the highlighted words in the following sentences:

1. The **class** leaves the school early every day to go on a field trip.
The word *class* is a collective noun because it refers to the group of students as a unit; therefore, it takes a singular verb, *leaves*.
2. The **police** have been searching for the murder weapon.
The word *police* is a collective noun because it refers to the group of police officers; however, it takes a plural compound verb, *have been searching*, instead of a singular verb.

Examples of Collective Nouns:

flock
committee
bouquet

herd
jury
chorus

army
anthology
gang

mob
orchestra
pile