THE NONCOUNT NOUN

Recognize a noncount noun when you find one.

Nouns name people, places, and things. Many nouns have both a singular and a plural form: *a surfer/surfers, a restaurant/restaurants, a pickle/pickles*. Some nouns, however, have only a singular form; you cannot add a number before or an *s* to the end of these words. This group of nouns is called noncount.

Read these examples:

After two months of *rainstorms*, Fred carries his umbrella everywhere in anticipation of more bad *weather*.

*Rainstorms* = count noun; *weather* = noncount noun.

Because Big Toe Joe has ripped all four *chairs* with his claws, Diane wants to buy new *furniture* and then find the cat another home.

*Chairs* = count noun; *furniture* = noncount noun.

When Professor Russell postponed the date of the research paper, *smiles* lit up the faces of her students, filling the room with their *happiness*.

*Smiles* = count noun; *happiness* = noncount noun.

Because the beautiful Josephine will help Pablo with his calculus *assignments*, he never minds the *homework* from Professor Ribley’s class.

*Assignments* = count noun; *homework* = noncount noun.

Know the different categories of noncount nouns.

The chart below illustrates the different types of noncount nouns. These categories also include nouns that are count. For example, *lightning*, a natural event (one of the categories), is noncount, but *hurricane*, a different natural event, is a count noun.
When you don’t know what type of noun you have, consult a dictionary that provides such information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Category</strong></th>
<th><strong>Examples</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abstractions</strong></td>
<td>advice, courage, enjoyment, fun, help, honesty, information, intelligence, knowledge, patience, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
<td>chess, homework, housework, music, reading, singing, sleeping, soccer, tennis, work, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food</strong></td>
<td>beef, bread, butter, fish, macaroni, meat, popcorn, pork, poultry, toast, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gases</strong></td>
<td>air, exhaust, helium, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, pollution, smog, smoke, steam, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Groups of Similar Items</strong></td>
<td>baggage, clothing, furniture, hardware, luggage, equipment, mail, money, software, vocabulary, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Liquids</strong></td>
<td>blood, coffee, gasoline, milk, oil, soup, syrup, tea, water, wine, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Natural Events</strong></td>
<td>electricity, gravity, heat, humidity, moonlight, rain, snow, sunshine, thunder, weather, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Materials</strong></td>
<td>aluminum, asphalt, chalk, cloth, concrete, cotton, glue, lumber, wood, wool, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Particles or Grains</strong></td>
<td>corn, dirt, dust, flour, hair, pepper, rice, salt, sugar, wheat, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Know how to indicate number with noncount nouns.

*Thunder*, a noncount noun, cannot have an *s* added at the end. You can, however, lie awake in bed counting the number of times that you hear thunder boom during a storm.

When you want to indicate number with a noncount word, you have two options. First, you can put *of* in front of the noncount word—for example, *of thunder*—and then attach the resulting *prepositional phrase* to an appropriate count word.

Kristina heard seven *claps of thunder*.

A second option is to make the noncount noun an *adjective* that you place before a *count noun*. Then you could write a sentence like this:

*Thunderheads* filled the sky.

Here are more examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noncount Noun</th>
<th>Countable Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>advice</td>
<td>pieces of advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homework</td>
<td>homework assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bread</td>
<td>loaves of bread, slices of bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>smoke</td>
<td>puffs of smoke, plumes of smoke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>software</td>
<td>software applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wine</td>
<td>bottles of wine, glasses of wine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>snow</td>
<td>snowstorms, snowflakes, snow drifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cloth</td>
<td>bolts of cloth, yards of cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dirt</td>
<td>piles of dirt, truckloads of dirt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some nouns are both noncount and count.

Sometimes a word that means one thing as a noncount noun has a slightly different meaning if it also has a countable version. Remember, then, that the classifications count and noncount are not absolute.

*Time* is a good example. When you use this word to mean the unceasing flow of experience that includes past, present, and future, with no distinct beginning or end, then *time* is a noncount noun.

Read this example:

> Time dragged as Simon sat through yet another boring chick flick with his girlfriend Roseanne.

*Time* = noncount because it has no specific beginning and, for poor Simon, no foreseeable end.

When *time* refers to a specific experience which starts at a certain moment and ends after a number of countable units (minutes, hours, days, etc.), then the noun is *count*.

Here is an example:

> On his last trip to Disney World, Joe rode Space Mountain twenty-seven times.

*Times* = count because a ride on Space Mountain is a measurable unit of experience, one that you can clock with a stopwatch.