THE NOUN

Recognize a noun when you find one.

George! Jupiter! Ice cream! Courage! Books! Bottles! Godzilla! These words are nouns, words that identify the whos, wheres, and whats in language. Nouns name people, places, and things.

Read this sentence:

George and Godzilla walked to Antonio’s to order a large pepperoni pizza.

George is a person. Antonio’s is a place. Pizza is a thing. Godzilla likes to think that he is a person, is as big as a place, but qualifies as another thing.

Understand the functions that nouns provide in sentences.

Nouns can function as subjects, direct objects, indirect objects, objects of prepositions, and subject complements.

Here are examples:

Godzilla ordered a large pepperoni pizza and ate the pie in a single bite.

Godzilla = subject for the action verbs ordered and ate.

George offered Godzilla a ten-dollar loan to buy a second pizza.

Godzilla = indirect object of the action verb offered; loan = direct object of offered.

While eating a piece of pizza, George dripping tomato sauce onto his shirt.

Shirt = object of the preposition onto.

In Godzilla’s opinion, George is a slob.
Know the different classes of nouns.

Nouns have different classes: proper and common, concrete and abstract, count and noncount, and collective.

Proper vs. Common Nouns

Proper nouns name specific, one-of-a-kind items while common nouns identify the general varieties. Proper nouns always begin with capital letters; common nouns, on the other hand, only require capitalization if they start the sentence or are part of a title.

Read these two versions:

George and Godzilla dined at Antonio’s.

George, Godzilla, Antonio’s = proper nouns.

A boy and his monster dined at a pizza restaurant.

Boy, monster, restaurant = common nouns.

Concrete vs. Abstract Nouns

You classify concrete and abstract nouns by their ability to register on your five senses. If you can see, hear, smell, taste, or feel the item, it is a concrete noun. If, however, you cannot experience the item with any of your senses, it is abstract.

Here are two examples:

Pizza is Godzilla’s favorite food.

Pizza = concrete because you can see, hear, smell, feel (though you will get your fingers greasy), and taste it (thankfully).

Godzilla never tips the delivery boy from Antonio’s; politeness is not one of Godzilla’s strong points.

Politeness = abstract (you cannot see politeness—it has no color, no shape, no size—or hear, smell, taste, or touch the quality itself).
**Count vs. Noncount Nouns**

Many nouns have singular and plural versions; these are **count nouns**. **Noncount nouns**, on the other hand, have only a singular form; to make them plural is illogical.

Read these sentences:

Godzilla ate three pizzas, two delivery boys, and six parked cars.

*Pizzas, boys, and cars = count nouns.* Godzilla did not have to be such a pig; he could have eaten just one pizza, one delivery boy, and one car.

After overindulging at Antonio’s, Godzilla got severe indigestion.

*Indigestion = noncount.* You *cannot* write, Godzilla got eleven indigestions.

**Collective Nouns**

**Collective nouns** name groups. Although the group is a single unit, it has more than one member. Some examples are army, audience, board, cabinet, class, committee, company, corporation, council, department, faculty, family, firm, group, jury, majority, minority, navy, public, school, society, team, and troupe.

Collective nouns are especially tricky when you are trying to make *verbs* and *pronouns* agree with them. The reason is that collective nouns can be singular or plural, depending on the behavior of the members of the group.

For example, if the members are acting as a unit—everyone doing the same thing at the same time—the collective noun is singular and requires singular verbs and pronouns.

Read this example:

Despite the danger to its new van, the SWAT team pursues the pizza-eating Godzilla through the streets of Miami.

In this sentence, the members of the collective noun *team* are acting in unison; each officer is engaged in the same activity at the same time. Thus, *its*, a singular pronoun, and *pursues*, a singular verb, are required.

Now read the next example:
After failing to contain Godzilla, the team change into their street clothes and sob in their cars on the way home.

Here, the team members are acting individually. They are not putting on one giant set of street clothes that covers them all. They are not in unison pulling on their left socks first, then their right socks second. Instead, the members are dressing as they wish, driving their own cars to their own homes. In this sentence, the collective noun is plural and requires plural pronouns (like their) and plural verbs (like change).

Keep in mind that a single noun can fall into more than one class.

Here is an example:

Godzilla has known five Georges.

Georges = proper, concrete, and count.