

# University of M'sila

Department of English  
First Year LMD Students

Course: Grammar  
Teacher: Miss. Hamouma  
*Lecturer: Ms. Djaidja*

## LESSON TWO: NOUNS

Nouns are naming words for people, animals, places, things, and qualities. In fact, they name everything around us including those that are invisible (wind, gas). A noun can be recognized by the determiners - the, a, an, some, this, etc - that come before it. This lesson will cover the following elements:

1. Kinds of Nouns
2. Singular and Plural Nouns
3. Countable and Uncountable Nouns
4. Possessive Form of Nouns

### 1. Kinds of Nouns

**There are five kinds of nouns:**

- a. Common Nouns
- b. Proper Nouns
- c. Concrete Nouns
- d. Abstract Nouns
- e. Collective Nouns

**a) Common Noun:** A **common noun** names a class of similar things (chair, box), and not an individual member of a specified group of people or things. We do not capitalize the first letter of a common noun unless it is the first word in a sentence. **Common nouns are names of people, things, animals and places, etc.**

**Examples:**

- **People** – aunt, boy, butcher, carpenter, cousin, father, girl, lady, man, mother, tailor, woman
- **Things** – bicycle, book, car, computer, dress, hammer, key, pencil, ship, table, vase, wallet
- **Animals** – armadillo, baboon, bee, caterpillar, cow, dog, eagle, fish, monkey, pig, snake, turkey
- **Places** – airport, beach, bullring, cemetery, church, country, hospital, library, mall, park, restaurant, zoo

**b) Proper Noun:** A **proper noun** is a special name of a person, place, organization, etc. We spell a proper noun with a **capital letter**. Proper nouns also refer to times or to dates in the calendar.

We can use plurals for proper nouns in exceptional cases.

- There are **three Johns** in my class.

We can also use **the, an, or a** for a proper noun in special circumstances.

- This is no longer the London I used to live in.

**Examples of Proper nouns of people, places, organization, etc.**

- **People** – Ali Baba, Barack Obama
- **Places** – Downing Street, Museum of Modern Art, Sahara Desert
- **Organization** – International Labour Organization, Red Brigades, United Nations
- **Animals** – King Kong, Lassie
- **Times and dates** – Saturday, April

**c) Concrete Noun :** A **concrete noun** is something we see or touch. It is the opposite of an abstract noun. There are **countable concrete nouns** and **uncountable concrete nouns**.

- **Countable:** teacher (people); valley (place); deer (animal); comb (thing)
- **Uncountable:** water (liquid); steam (gas); copper (substance)

**d) Abstract Nouns:** An **abstract noun** is a quality or something that we can only think of rather than as something that we can see or touch. We can form abstract nouns from common nouns (child – childhood); from verbs (know – knowledge); and from adjectives (happy – happiness), e.g. **advice experience horror pity beauty fear information relief courage help knowledge suspicion death hope mercy work**. Abstract nouns are used with a zero article, but some abstract nouns can be used in a particular sense with **a/an**:

**a help:** *My children are a great help to me. A good map would be a help.*

**a relief:** *It was a relief to sit down.*

**a knowledge + of:** *He had a good knowledge of mathematics.*

**a dislike/dread/hatred/horror/love + of** is also possible: *a love of music a hatred of violence*

**a mercy/pity/shame/wonder** can be used with *that*-clauses introduced by *it*: *It's a pity you weren't here. It's a shame he wasn't paid.*

**it + be + a pity/shame + infinitive** is also possible: *It would be a pity to cut down these trees.*

**a fear/fears, a hope/hopes, a suspicion/suspensions:** These can be used with *that*-clauses introduced by **there**:

*There is a fear/There are fears that he has been murdered.*

We can also have *a fear/fears, a hope/hopes, a suspicion/suspensions* that something can arouse

**e) Collective Nouns:** A **collective noun** is a name used for a number of people, animals or things that we group together and speak of as a whole. For example: *crowd, flock, group, swarm, team*, etc. Viewed as a single unit, a group uses a singular verb; regarded as separate members making up the group, it takes a plural verb.

- The **family is** planning an overseas trip. (The family is viewed as a single unit planning and going overseas together, so it takes a singular verb.)
- The **family are** discussing about the plan. (The family members are taking part in the discussion and are no longer considered a single unit, so it uses a plural verb.)

A collective noun can take a singular or a plural verb. The following nouns can be singular or plural. Viewed as a single unit, the noun takes a singular verb; regarded as a group of separate members or parts, it becomes a plural noun used with a plural verb.

#### Examples:

- The new **government has** gained more support since taking office.
- The **Government are** determined to keep inflation in check.
- The explorers stumbled across **a species of plant** unknown to science.
- Different **fish species have** been found in the coastal waters of the island.
- **Data indicates** that most of the offenders come from broken home.
- We will not draw any conclusion until we have looked at **all the data**.
- **Statistics is** included in this year's Mathematics syllabus.
- The **statistics tell** us the current trend is towards more consumers' spending.
- The **enemy is** calling for a ceasefire.
- Security is very tight as the **enemy are** everywhere.

A collective noun treated as singular uses a singular possessive pronoun; a plural collective noun takes a plural possessive pronoun.

#### Examples:

- Our **team** has won **its** first trophy. (The singular possessive pronoun is **its**. The singular possessive pronoun **its** agrees with the singular collective noun **team**.)
- Our **team** are deciding on the strategy for **their** next game. (Plural possessive pronoun: **their**)
- The full **orchestra** led by **its** new conductor is performing in the city.
- The **orchestra** do not agree to the venue for **their** next performance.
- The **audience** showed **its** approval by clapping and cheering.
- When the curtain came down, the **audience** began leaving **their** seats.

## 2. Singular and Plural Nouns

A **singular noun** refers to just one person, animal, thing or place while a **plural noun** represents more than one person, animal, thing or place. Nouns are either singular or plural. Most plural nouns have an **-s** added to their endings. Other plural nouns do not follow this same ending. Some of the common plural endings are:

| Singular                          | Plural              | How the plural is formed                 |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| daughter                          | daughters           | By adding –s                             |
| class                             | classes             | By adding –es to nouns ending –s         |
| brush                             | brushes             | By adding –es to nouns ending –sh        |
| watch                             | watches             | By adding –es to nouns ending –ch        |
| box                               | boxes               | By adding –es to nouns ending –x         |
| potato                            | potatoes            | By adding –es to nouns ending –o         |
| Piano kilo photo (foreign origin) | pianos kilos photos | By adding –s to nouns ending –o          |
| baby                              | babies              | By changing –y to –ies                   |
| key                               | keys                | By adding –s to some nouns ending –y     |
| leaf                              | leaves              | By changing –f to –ves                   |
| knife                             | knives              | By changing –fe to –ves                  |
| roof                              | roofs               | By adding –s to some nouns ending –f     |
| safe                              | safes               | By adding –s to some nouns ending –fe    |
| tooth                             | teeth               | By changing vowels                       |
| ox                                | oxen                | By adding –en                            |
| child                             | children            | By adding –ren                           |
| Deer sheep                        | Deer sheep          | Some nouns have same singular and plural |

**Note:** A few nouns form their plural by a **vowel** change: *louse, lice mouse, mice woman, women goose, geese man, men foot, feet.*

Twelve nouns ending in **f** or **fe** drop the **f** or **fe** and add **ves**. These nouns are **calf, half, knife, leaf, life, loaf, self, sheaf, shelf, thief, wife, wolf: loaf, loaves wife, wives wolf, wolves etc.**

The nouns **hoof, scarf and wharf** *take* either **s** or **ves** in the plural: **hoofs or hooves, scarfs or scarves wharfs or wharves.**

Other words ending in **f** or **fe** add **s** in the ordinary way: **cliff, cliffs handkerchief, handkerchiefs safe, safes**

Some words which retain their original Greek or Latin forms make their plurals according to the rules of Greek and Latin: **crisis, crises phenomenon, phenomena**

### Pronunciation:

**s** is pronounced /s/ after a **p, k** or **f** sound. Otherwise it is pronounced /z/.

When **s** is placed after **ce, ge, se** or **ze** an extra syllable (/iz/) is added to the spoken word.

When **es** is placed after **ch, sh, ss** or **x** an extra syllable (/iz/) is added to the spoken word

There are nouns that **are always plural and take a plural verb:**

Jeans, knickers, pants, pyjamas, shorts, tights, trousers, and underpants

Pincers, pliers, scissors, shears, tongs

Clogs, sandals, slippers, and sneakers

Glasses (spectacles), binoculars

### Examples:

- **These trousers** are not mine.
- **Pliers** are a handy tool.
- My garden **shears trim** the hedge very well.
- My **glasses** are used only for reading.

"A **pair of**" can be used with the above plural nouns and take a **singular verb**.

- **This pair** of purple **trousers** does not match your yellow jacket.
- **These knives** do not cut well. A new **pair of** stainless steel **scissors** is what I need.

Other nouns **that are always plural**:

- Clothes: My **clothes** need to be washed but I don't have the time.
- Earnings: **Earnings** in the agricultural sector **have** increased by 5% in the fourth quarter.
- Cattle: **Cattle** are reared for their meat or milk.
- Police: **Police** are charging him with the murder of the princess.
- People: **People** in general are **not** very approachable. (**Peoples** when used in the plural (i.e. with '-s') refers to peoples from more than one race or nation, e.g. the peoples of Asia)

**Nouns which are plural in form but take a singular verb**: A number of words ending in **ics**, *economics, acoustics, athletics, ethics, hysterics, mathematics, linguistics, physics, politics* etc , which **are plural in form, normally take a plural verb**: *His mathematics are weak.*

But **names of sciences** can sometimes be considered **singular**:

**Mathematics** is an exact science.      **Economics** was my favourite subject at school.

Words **plural in form but singular in meaning** include: **news** and **certain diseases** as: *mumps rickets shingles*

- News – The good **news** is that we have all been invited.
- Diseases such as mumps, measles, etc: An infectious illness, **mumps** was common among children.

Measurements and amounts that are considered as a single unit:

- **One hundred years** is a century.
- **Ten kilometres** is a long distance.
- **Twenty dollars** is not enough to buy a good shirt.
- **Seven days** in prison is all he got for shoplifting.

## **3. Countable and Uncountable Nouns**

**Countable nouns** (also called **count nouns**) are nouns that can be counted (e.g. oranges). **Uncountable nouns** (also known as **non-count** or **mass nouns**) are amounts of something which we cannot count (e.g. sand). Examples include *bread cream gold paper tea beer dust ice sand water cloth gin jam soap wine coffee glass oil stone wood baggage damage luggage shopping camping furniture parking weather* . So how do we know whether or not a noun is countable or uncountable?

Many of the nouns in the above groups can be used **in a particular sense** and are then countable. They can take **a/an** in the singular and can be used in the plural. Some examples are given below. **Hair** (all the hair on one's head) is considered uncountable, but if we consider each hair separately we say **one hair, two hairs** etc.: *Her hair is black*      *Whenever she finds a grey hair she pulls it out*

We can walk in **a wood/woods**. **Experience** meaning 'something which happened to someone' is countable: *He had an exciting experience/some exciting experiences (= adventure/s) last week.*

**Work** meaning 'occupation/employment/a job/jobs' is uncountable: *He is looking for work/for a job.* **works** (plural only) can mean 'factory' or 'moving parts of a machine'. **Works** (usually plural) can be used of literary or musical compositions: *Shakespeare's complete works.*

### The noun is **countable**:

if we can use the indefinite article **a/an** before it.

- I own **a** car. / I play with **an** ostrich.

if we can use the word '**many**' (and **not** '**much**') to describe it.

- She has **many** friends. (It's wrong to say: She has much friends.)

if we can express its quantity by using a number before it.

- I have **five** apples.

if it takes singular as well as plural forms.

- an orange / some oranges / fifty oranges

### The noun is **uncountable**:

if **a/an** is not normally used in front of it.

- He is eating **some rice**. (**NOT**: He is eating a rice.) Rice is treated as not countable, so **some** (which can be used for both countable and uncountable nouns) is used with it.

if the word **much** can be correctly used with it.

- How **much rice** have you eaten? (**NOT**: How many rice have you eaten?)

if it is not possible for us to count it. However, we can make it countable by having a **quantity** for it.

- I have just bought **two cartons** or **litres/liters** of milk. (**NOT**: I have just bought two milk.)

if it takes only a singular form.

- some ice (**NOT**: some ices) / some ink (**NOT**: some inks) / some soup (**NOT**: some soups)

Some nouns can be countable or uncountable. It depends on how they are used.

**Examples:** I boil an egg. (Countable noun)      I like egg. (Uncountable noun, as it refers to egg in general).

**Countable and Uncountable Nouns are used with the following:**

| <u>Countable Noun</u>        | <u>Uncountable Noun</u>          |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| a, an, a few, several, many, | a little, much, some, plenty of, |
| some, plenty of, a lot of,   | a lot of, a large amount of,     |
| a large number of            | a great deal of                  |

## 4. Possessive form of nouns

Nouns have a possessive form. We use it to show ownership.

**To show the possessive form, put an apostrophe ' + s = ('s) after a singular noun. Examples:**

- This is my dog and that is Tom's cat.
- The child is pulling the cow's tail.
- 

**Use an apostrophe ' + s = ('s) after plural nouns that do not end in s to make the possessive form.**

**Examples:**

- Some people's houses in the neighbourhood are bigger than ours.
- He cut off the mice's tails.
- 

**When making plural possessive nouns which end with an s, add only an apostrophe ('). Examples:**

- The girls' mother is taller than the boys' mother.
- Their wives' parents were present in the Christmas celebrations.
- 

**Two possessive forms ('s) may appear one after the other. Examples:**

- She is Jim's brother's girlfriend.
- This is Tom's car and that is Tom's father's car.

When two nouns/names that are joined together are joint owners, the possessive form should take an 's after the second name only. Examples:

- On that hill is Jack and Jill's house. (The house belongs to both Jack and Jill)
- Paul and Paula's mother is a doctor.
- 

When two nouns (names) that are joined together have different ownership, each will need an apostrophe s ('s) added. Examples:

- Adam's and Eve's cars are parked one behind the other.
- The police are keeping watch on the suspect's and his accomplice's houses.

When a proper name ends in s, the possessive form can take either an apostrophe and an s ('s) or only an apostrophe ' . Examples:

- This is a portrait of King **Charles's** wife.
- This is a portrait of King **Charles'** wife.
- My uncle **James's** factory was burnt down last night.
- My uncle **James'** factory was burnt down last night.

Only an apostrophe and an s ('s) is used when the place of business is understood and thus not stated. Examples:

- He went to the barber's to have his hair cut.
- She was at the butcher's when I called her.
- 

Names of the owners of some **businesses** can be used similarly: *Sotheby's, Clandge's*

Some very **well-known shops** etc call themselves by the possessive form and some drop the apostrophe:

**Foyles, Harrods**

Names of **people** can sometimes be used similarly to mean '...s house': *We had lunch at **Bill's**. We met at **Ann's**.*

### Use of the "possessive case" and "of + noun"

A/ The possessive case is chiefly used of people, countries or animals as shown above. It can also be Used with:

**1 Of ships and boats:** *the ship's bell, the yacht's mast*

**2 Of planes, trains, cars and other vehicles**, though here the of construction is safer:  
*a glider's wings or the wings of a glider. the tram's heating system or the heating system of the train.*

**3 In time expressions':** *a week's holiday today's paper tomorrow's weather in two years' time ten minutes' break two hours' delay. a ten-minute break, a two-hour delay are also possible: We have ten minutes' break/a ten-minute break.*

£ **4 In expressions of money + worth:** *£1's worth of stamps ten dollars' worth of ice-cream*

**5 With for + noun + sake:** *for heaven's sake, for goodness' sake*

**6 In a few expressions** such as: *a stone's throw journey's end the water's edge*

**7** We can say either a winter's day or a winter day and a summer's day or a summer day, but we cannot make **spring or autumn** possessive, except when they are personified: *Autumn's return.*

**B/ "of + noun"** is used for possession:

**1** When the possessor noun is followed by a phrase or clause:

*The boys ran about, obeying the directions of a man with a whistle.  
I took the advice of a couple I met on the train and hired a car.*

2 With **inanimate ‘possessors’**, except those listed in A above:

*the walls of the town      the roof of the church      the keys of the car*

However, it is often possible to replace noun **X** + **of** + noun **Y** by noun **Y** + noun **X** in that order:

*the town walls              the church roof              the car keys*

The first noun becomes a sort of **adjective** and is **not made plural**: **the roofs of the churches = the church roofs** . Unfortunately *noun* + **of** + *noun* combinations **cannot always be replaced in this way** and the student is advised to use *of* when in doubt.

### Which is correct?

- 1 It's quite a long book. There are 450 page / 450 pages. (450 pages is correct)
- 2 I didn't have any change. I only had a twenty-pound / twenty pounds note.
- 3 I looked down and there were two ten-pound / ten pounds notes on the ground.
- 4 At work in the morning I usually have a 15-minute / 15 minutes break for coffee.
- 5 There are 60-minute / 60 minutes in an hour.
- 6 It's only a two-hour / two hours flight from London to Madrid.
- 7 My office is on the tenth floor of a twelve-storey / twelve storeys building.
- 8 I work five-day / five days a week. Saturday and Sunday are free.
- 9 Five-star / Five stars hotels are the most expensive.
- 10 Sam's daughter is six-year-old / six years old.
- 11 The oldest building in the city is the 500-year-old / 500 years old castle.
- 12 Do you use the twelve-hour / twelve hours clock or the 24-hour / 24 hours clock?