

## Countable and uncountable 2

## A

Many nouns are sometimes countable, and sometimes uncountable. Usually there is a difference in meaning. Compare:

## Countable

- ☐ Did you hear **a noise** just now?  
(= a specific noise)
- ☐ I bought **a paper** to read.  
(= a newspaper)
- ☐ There's **a hair** in my soup!  
(= one single hair)
- ☐ This is **a nice room**.  
(= a room in a house)
- ☐ I had some interesting **experiences**  
while I was travelling.  
(= things that happened to me)
- ☐ Enjoy your trip. Have **a great time**!

## Uncountable

- ☐ I can't work here. There's too much **noise**. (= noise in general)
- ☐ I need **some paper** to write on.  
(= material for writing on)
- ☐ You've got very long **hair**. (*not* hairs)  
(= all the hair on your head)
- ☐ You can't sit here. There isn't **room**.  
(= space)
- ☐ I was offered the job because I had a lot of **experience**. (*not* experiences)  
(= experience of that type of job)
- ☐ I can't wait. I don't have **time**.

**Coffee/tea/juice/beer** etc. (drinks) are normally uncountable:

- ☐ I don't like **coffee** very much.

But you can say **a coffee** (= a cup of coffee), **two coffees** (= two cups) etc. :

- ☐ **Two coffees** and **an orange juice**, please.

## B

These nouns are usually uncountable:

<b>accommodation</b>	<b>behaviour</b>	<b>damage</b>	<b>luck</b>	<b>permission</b>	<b>traffic</b>
<b>advice</b>	<b>bread</b>	<b>furniture</b>	<b>luggage</b>	<b>progress</b>	<b>weather</b>
<b>baggage</b>	<b>chaos</b>	<b>information</b>	<b>news</b>	<b>scenery</b>	<b>work</b>

We do not normally use **a/an** with these nouns:

- ☐ I'm going to buy **some bread**. *or* ... **a loaf of bread**. (*not* a bread)
- ☐ Enjoy your holiday! I hope you have good **weather**. (*not* a good weather)

These nouns are not usually plural (so we do not say 'breads', 'furnitures' etc.):

- ☐ Where are you going to put all your **furniture**? (*not* furnitures)
- ☐ Let me know if you need more **information**. (*not* informations)

**News** is uncountable, not plural:

- ☐ The **news was** unexpected. (*not* The news were)

**Travel** (*noun*) means 'travelling in general' (uncountable). We do not say 'a travel' to mean **a trip** or **a journey**:

- ☐ They spend a lot of money on **travel**.
- ☐ We had a very good **trip/journey**. (*not* a good travel)

Compare these countable and uncountable nouns:

## Countable

- ☐ I'm looking for **a job**.
- ☐ What **a beautiful view**!
- ☐ It's **a nice day** today.
- ☐ We had a lot of **bags**.
- ☐ **These chairs** are mine.
- ☐ That's **a good suggestion**.
- ☐ There were a lot of **cars**.

## Uncountable

- ☐ I'm looking for **work**. (*not* a work)
- ☐ What beautiful **scenery**!
- ☐ It's nice **weather** today.
- ☐ We had a lot of **baggage/luggage**.
- ☐ **This furniture** is mine.
- ☐ That's good **advice**.
- ☐ There **was** a lot of **traffic**.

## Exercises

## 70.1 Which is correct?

- 1 a The engine is making strange noise / a strange noise. What is it? (a strange noise is correct)
- b We live near a busy road so there's a lot of noise / there are a lot of noises.
- 2 a Light / A light comes from the sun.
- b I thought there was somebody in the house because there was light / a light on inside.
- 3 a I was in a hurry this morning. I didn't have time / a time for breakfast.
- b We really enjoyed our holiday. We had great time / a great time.
- 4 a Can I have glass of water / a glass of water, please?
- b Be careful. The window has been broken and there's broken glass / a broken glass on the floor.
- 5 a We stayed at a hotel. We had very nice room / a very nice room.
- b We have a big garage. There's room / a room for two cars.

## 70.2 Which is correct?

- 1 Did you have nice weather / a nice weather when you were away? (nice weather is correct)
- 2 We were very unfortunate. We had bad luck / a bad luck.
- 3 Our travel / journey from Paris to Moscow by train was very tiring.
- 4 When the fire alarm rang, there was complete chaos / a complete chaos.
- 5 Bad news don't / doesn't make people happy.
- 6 There's some lovely scenery / a lovely scenery in this part of the country.
- 7 I like my job, but it's very hard work / a very hard work.
- 8 I want to print some documents, but the printer is out of paper / papers.
- 9 The trip took a long time. There was heavy traffic / a heavy traffic.
- 10 Your hair is / Your hairs are too long. You should have it / them cut.

## 70.3 Complete the sentences using the following words. Use the plural (-s) where necessary.

advice	chair	damage	experience	experience
furniture	hair	<del>luggage</del>	permission	progress

- 1 We didn't have much luggage – just two small bags.
- 2 We have no \_\_\_\_\_, not even a bed or a table.
- 3 There is room for everybody to sit down. There are plenty of \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4 Who is that woman with short \_\_\_\_\_? Do you know her?
- 5 Carla's English is better than it was. She's made good \_\_\_\_\_.
- 6 If you want to take pictures here, you need to ask for \_\_\_\_\_.
- 7 I didn't know what I should do, so I asked Chris for \_\_\_\_\_.
- 8 I don't think Dan should get the job. He doesn't have enough \_\_\_\_\_.
- 9 Kate has done many interesting things. She could write a book about her \_\_\_\_\_.
- 10 The \_\_\_\_\_ caused by the storm will cost a lot to repair.

## 70.4 What do you say in these situations? Use the word in brackets in your sentence.

- 1 Your friends have just arrived at the station. You can't see any cases or bags. You ask:  
(luggage) Do you have any luggage \_\_\_\_\_?
- 2 You go to a tourist office. You want to know about places to visit in the town.  
(information) I'd like \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3 You are a student. You want your teacher to advise you about which courses to do. You say:  
(advice) Can you give \_\_\_\_\_?
- 4 You applied for a job and you've just heard that you were successful. You call Tom and say:  
(good news) Hi, Tom. I \_\_\_\_\_ I got the job!
- 5 You are at the top of a mountain. You can see a very long way. It's beautiful. You say:  
(view) It \_\_\_\_\_, isn't it?
- 6 You look out of the window. The weather is horrible: cold, wet and windy. You say:  
(weather) What \_\_\_\_\_!