

Countable nouns with **a/an** and **some**

**A** Countable nouns can be *singular* or *plural*:

a <b>dog</b>	a <b>child</b>	the <b>evening</b>	this <b>party</b>	an <b>umbrella</b>
<b>dogs</b>	some <b>children</b>	the <b>evenings</b>	these <b>parties</b>	two <b>umbrellas</b>

Before singular countable nouns you can use **a/an**:

- ☐ Bye! Have **a** nice **evening**.
- ☐ Do you need **an** **umbrella**?

You cannot use singular countable nouns alone (without **a/the/my** etc.):

- ☐ She never wears **a** **hat**. (*not* wears hat)
- ☐ Be careful of **the** **dog**.
- ☐ What **a** beautiful **day**!
- ☐ Did you hurt **your** **leg**?

**B** We use **a/an** ... to say what kind of thing something is, or what kind of person somebody is:

- ☐ That's a **nice** **table**.

In the plural we use the noun alone (*not* some ...):

- ☐ Those are **nice** **chairs**. (*not* some nice chairs)

Compare singular and plural:

- ☐ A dog is **a** **animal**.
- ☐ I'm **a** **optimist**.
- ☐ My father is **a** **doctor**.
- ☐ Jane is **a** **really nice person**.
- ☐ What **a** **lovely dress**!

- ☐ Dogs are **animals**.
- ☐ We're **optimists**.
- ☐ My parents are both **doctors**.
- ☐ Jane and Ben are **really nice people**.
- ☐ What **awful shoes**!

We say that somebody has **a long nose** / **a nice face** / **blue eyes** / **long fingers** etc. :

- ☐ Jack has a long **nose**.  
(*not* the long nose)

- ☐ Jack has **blue eyes**.  
(*not* the blue eyes)

We use **a/an** when we say what somebody's job is:

- ☐ Sandra is **a** **nurse**. (*not* Sandra is nurse)
- ☐ Would you like to be **a** **English teacher**?

**C** You can use **some** with plural countable nouns. We use **some** in two ways.

(1) **some** = a number (of) / a few (of) / a pair (of):

- ☐ I've seen **some** good **movies** recently. (*not* I've seen good movies)
- ☐ **Some** **friends** of mine are coming to stay at the weekend.
- ☐ I need **some** new **sunglasses**. (= a new pair of sunglasses)

Often you can say the same thing with or without **some**. For example:

- ☐ I need (**some**) new **clothes**.
- ☐ The room was empty apart from a table and (**some**) **chairs**.

Do not use **some** when you are talking about things in general (see Unit 75):

- ☐ I love **bananas**. (*not* some bananas)
- ☐ My aunt is a writer. She writes **books**. (*not* some books)

(2) **some** = some but not all:

- ☐ **Some** **children** learn very quickly. (but not all children)
- ☐ Tomorrow there will be rain in **some** **places**, but most of the country will be dry.

## Exercises

**71.1 What are these things? Choose from the box and write a sentence.**

- 1 an eagle ..... It's a bird.
- 2 a pigeon, a duck and a penguin ..... They're birds.
- 3 carrots and onions .....
- 4 a tulip .....
- 5 Earth, Mars and Jupiter .....
- 6 chess .....
- 7 a hammer, a saw and a screwdriver .....
- 8 the Nile, the Rhine and the Mekong .....
- 9 a mosquito .....
- 10 Hindi, Arabic and Swahili .....

bird(s)  
flower(s)  
game(s)  
insect(s)  
language(s)  
planet(s)  
river(s)  
tool(s)  
vegetable(s)

**71.2 Read about what these people do. What are their jobs? Choose from:**

**chef   interpreter   journalist   ~~nurse~~   plumber   surgeon   tour guide   waiter**

- 1 Sarah looks after patients in hospital. She's a nurse.
- 2 Gary works in a restaurant. He brings the food to the tables. He .....
- 3 Jane writes articles for a newspaper. ....
- 4 Kevin works in a hospital. He operates on people. ....
- 5 Jonathan cooks in a restaurant. ....
- 6 Dave installs and repairs water pipes. ....
- 7 Anna shows visitors round her city and tells them about it. ....
- 8 Lisa translates what people are saying from one language into another, so that they can understand each other. ....

**71.3 Which is right?**

- 1 Most of my friends are students / ~~some students~~. (students is correct)
- 2 Are you careful driver / a careful driver?
- 3 I went to the library and borrowed books / some books.
- 4 Mark works in a bookshop. He sells books / some books.
- 5 I've been walking for hours. I've got sore feet / some sore feet.
- 6 I don't feel very well. I've got sore throat / a sore throat.
- 7 What lovely present / a lovely present! Thank you very much.
- 8 I met students / some students in a cafe yesterday. They were from China.
- 9 It might rain. Don't go out without umbrella / without an umbrella.
- 10 People / Some people learn languages more easily than others.

**71.4 Put in a/an or some where necessary. If no word is necessary, leave the space empty.**

- 1 I've seen some good movies recently.
- 2 Are you feeling all right? Do you have a headache?
- 3 I know lots of people. Most of them are ..... students.
- 4 When I was ..... child, I used to be very shy.
- 5 ..... birds, for example the penguin, cannot fly.
- 6 Would you like to be ..... actor?
- 7 Questions, questions, questions! You're always asking ..... questions!
- 8 I didn't expect to see you. What ..... surprise!
- 9 Do you like staying in ..... hotels?
- 10 Tomorrow is a holiday. .... shops will be open, but most of them will be closed.
- 11 Those are ..... nice shoes. Where did you get them?
- 12 You need ..... visa to visit ..... countries, but not all of them.
- 13 Kate is ..... teacher. Her parents were ..... teachers too.
- 14 I don't believe him. He's ..... liar. He's always telling ..... lies.