Count and Non-count Nouns

Count Nouns
“Count” nouns are people or things that we are able to count.

Examples:
- The tree
- A kitten
- An avocado

Singular countable nouns
*The* is used before specific countable nouns. In other words, the speaker and listener both know which one is being referred to.

Examples:
- Her daughter read a book under *the* tree.
- Will you feed *the* kitten for me?
- He can eat *the* avocado if he wants to.

*A/An* is used before general countable nouns. It is similar to using "one" before a noun.

Examples:
- Our neighbors always plant *a* tree on Earth Day.
- Her father said she could get *a* kitten if she promised to take care of it.
- I would like to eat *an* avocado with dinner.

Plural countable nouns
Plural nouns do not use *a/an* (since *a/an* is similar to "one.") Most of the time, plural nouns will not use an article.

Examples:
- The driveway is lined with trees.
- Most kittens have a lot of energy.
- Avocados are rich in vitamins and healthy fats.

*The* is used before specific plural countable nouns.

Examples:
- We need to trim *the* trees that stand along *the* street.
- Have *the* kittens been weaned?
- It will take two or three more days for *the* avocados to ripen.
Non-Count Nouns

“Non-count” nouns are materials, abstractions, and other things that cannot be counted. They are not considered separate objects or singular units.

Examples:
- Most plastics are produced from petroleum.
- Many people value honesty in their interpersonal relationships.
- I will be completely out of energy until I drink another cup of coffee.
- There is an incredible amount of electricity in a lightning storm.

A good way to identify a non-count noun is to ask the question: can I have an amount of this? Count nouns will not pass the amount test. You do not have an amount of trees—you have a number of trees. Alternatively, you do not have a number of petroleum—you have an amount of petroleum.

Non-count nouns are also not singular or plural. Just as you cannot have one honesty, one cannot have many honesties (which is not a real word, since honesty does not have a plural form). Honesty is simply a thing that one can possess or not, value or not, though in varying amounts.

General Tips

Words that work with non-count nouns include: amount, little, some, much, a lot, the.

Words that work with count nouns include: few, many, number words, a/an, the.

Notice that the word “the” works for both types of nouns. “The” does not indicate number or amount, only that the noun following it is a specific, designated entity.

Contact

Want to learn more about Count and Non-Count Nouns? Come work with a tutor at the Writing Center! Drop by or use the information below to contact us and set up an appointment.

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