

COUNTABLE & NON-COUNTABLE NOUNS

The discrimination in English between count & mass nouns is a very important skill. Many of the mistakes learners make have to do with using nouns without their correct determiners (articles, demonstratives, quantifiers and the like)

While most languages share this distribution of nouns between those which can be counted (i.e.: separate objects, people, ideas...) and those which are regarded as masses without clear boundaries (such as materials, liquids, abstract qualities...), the distinction in English is sometimes puzzling:

Why is it that we can **make a suggestion**, but we *can't give anybody *an advice*, we've got to say "*some advice*" or "*a word of advice*", or simply "*advice*"?

It's something we've got to learn.

You may have noticed that some words change their meanings, depending on whether they're being used as count nouns or mass nouns; some examples: **country** ("*campo*", "*pais*"), **glass** ("*crystal*", "*vaso*"), **paper** ("*papel*", "*periódico*"), **time** ("*tiempo*", "*vez*"), **wood** ("*bosque*", "*madera*")...

Still more interesting, there are some words that are typically countable (or uncountable) and for which there is an equivalent mass noun (or count noun). It's good to learn all these words and build a clear map of the kind of determiners they go with.

THINGS	STUFF
A NUISANCE	NONSENSE
A JOURNEY / TRIP	TRAVEL
A JOB	WORK
A DEAL	BUSINESS
A TIP	ADVICE
A MEAL	FOOD
A FACT	KNOWLEDGE
A DISEASE	SICKNESS
A PHOTOGRAPH	PHOTOGRAPHY
A PLACE TO STAY	ACCOMMODATION
AN EXPERIMENT	RESEARCH
SHOES	FOOTWEAR
PIGS	PORK
PROBLEMS	TROUBLE
ADVERTISEMENTS	PUBLICITY
CHORES	HOUSEWORK
ANIMALS	WILDLIFE
VEHICLES	TRAFFIC
SUITCASES / BAGS	LUGGAGE / BAGGAGE
THE TEMPERATURE	THE WEATHER

If you want to refer to a limited quantity or amount of a non-countable noun, you can use partitives. Some are very specific: *a bar of chocolate / soap; a loaf of bread... / an article / item of clothing / An article / a piece of furniture...*

The most productive are: **a bit of...** / **an item of...** / **a piece of...**

A piece / an item of **news** / **information**...

A bit / piece of **advice**...