

Fourth edition

A Practical English Grammar

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Preface to the fourth edition

A Practical English Grammar is intended for intermediate and post-intermediate students. We hope that more advanced learners and teachers will also find it useful.

The book is a comprehensive survey of structures and forms, written in clear modern English and illustrated with numerous examples. Areas of particular difficulty have been given special attention. Differences between conversational usage and strict grammatical forms are shown but the emphasis is on conversational forms.

In the fourth edition the main changes are as follows:

- 1 Explanations and examples have been brought up to date.
- 2 There is now more information on countable and uncountable nouns, attributive and predicative adjectives, adverbs of place, sentence adverbs, cleft sentences, prepositions, conjunctions, modal verbs, perfect tenses, infinitive constructions, the passive purpose clauses and noun clauses.
- 3 Some material has been rearranged to make comparisons easier. For example, parts of chapters on *can*, *may*, *must* etc. are now grouped by function; verbs of liking and preference have a chapter to themselves; suggestions and invitations have joined the chapter on commands, requests and advice.
- 4 The contents list now summarises every section heading, and there is a new index containing many more entries and references.

In this edition the sign '~' is frequently used to denote a change of speaker in examples of dialogue. Note also that although the sign '=' sometimes connects two words or expressions with the same meaning, it is often used more freely, e.g. to indicate a transformation from active to passive or direct to indirect speech.

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London, November 1985

A.J.T., A.V.M.

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1 Articles and **one, a little/a few, this, that**

1 **a/an** (the indefinite article)

The form **a** is used before a word beginning with a consonant, or a vowel with a consonant sound:

a man *a had* *a university* *a European*
a one-way street

The form **an** is used before words beginning with a vowel (**a, e, i, o, u**) or words beginning with a mute **h**:

an apple *an island* *an uncle*
an egg *an onion* *an hour*

or individual letters spoken with a vowel sound:

an L-plate *an MP* *an SOS* *an 'x'*

a/an is the same for all genders:

a man *a woman* *an actor* *an actress* *a table*

2 Use of **a/an**

a/an is used:

A Before a singular noun which is countable (i.e. of which there is more than one) when it is mentioned for the first time and represents no particular person or thing:

I need a visa. They live in a flat. He bought an ice-cream.

B Before a singular countable noun which is used as an example of a class of things:

A car must be insured
All cars/Any car must be insured.
A child needs love
All children need/Any child needs love.

C With a noun complement. This includes names of professions:

It was an earthquake. She'll be a dancer. He is an actor.

D In certain expressions of quantity:

a lot of *a couple*
a great many *a dozen* (but *one dozen* is also possible)
a great deal of

E With certain numbers:

a hundred *a thousand* (See 349.)

Before **half** when **half** follows a whole number;

1 ½ kilos = one and a half kilos or *a kilo and a half*

But *½ kg = half a kilo* (no **a** before *half*), though *a + half + noun* is sometimes possible:

a half-holiday *a half-portion* *a half-share*

With *1/3, ¼, 1/5* etc. **a** is usual: *a third, a quarter* etc., but **one** is also possible. (See 350.)

F In expressions of price, speed, ratio, etc.:

5p a kilo *£1 a metre* *sixty kilometres an hour*
10 p a dozen *four times a day*

(Here **a/an** = **per**)

G In exclamations before singular, countable nouns:

Such a long queue! *What a pretty girl!* But
Such long queues! *What pretty girls!*

(Plural nouns, so no article. See 3.)

H **a** can be placed before Mr/Mrs/Miss + surname:

a Mr Smith *a Mrs Smith* *a Miss Smith* *a Mr Smith*

means 'a man called Smith' and implies that he is a stranger to the speaker. *Mr Smith*, without *a*, implies that the speaker knows Mr Smith or knows of his existence.
(For the difference between **a/an** and **one**, see 4. For **a few** and **a little**, see 5.)

3 Omission of **a/an**

- a/an** is omitted;
- A Before plural nouns.
a/an has no plural form. So the plural of *a dog* is *dogs*, and of *an egg* is *eggs*.
- B Before uncountable nouns (see 13).
- C Before names of meals, except when these are preceded by an adjective:
We have breakfast at eight.
He gave us a good breakfast.
- The article is also used when it is a special meal given to celebrate something or in someone's honour:
I was invited to dinner (at their house, in the ordinary way) but
I was invited to a dinner given to welcome the new ambassador.

4 **a/an** and **one**

A **a/an** and **one** (adjective)

- 1 When counting or measuring time, distance, weight etc. we can use either **a/an** or **one** for the singular:
£1 = a/one pound £1,000,000 = a/one million pounds (See chapter 36.)
But note that in *The rent is £100 a week* the **a** before *week* is not replaceable by **one** (see 2 F).
In other types of statement **a/an** and **one** are **not** normally interchangeable, because **one** + noun normally means 'one only/not more than one' and **a/an** does not mean this:
A shotgun is no good. (It is the wrong sort of thing.)
One shotgun is no good. (I need two or three.)
- 2 Special uses of **one**
- (a) **one** (adjective/pronoun) used with **another/others**:
One (boy) wanted to read, another /others wanted to watch TV.
(See 53.)
One day he wanted his lunch early, another day he wanted it late.
- (b) **one** can be used before *day/week/month/year/summer/winter* etc. or before the name of the day or month to denote a particular time when something happened:
One night there was a terrible storm.
One winter the snow fell early.
One day a telegram arrived.
- (c) **one day** can also be used to mean 'at some future date':
One day you'll be sorry you treated him so badly.
(*Some day* would also be possible.)
(For **one** and **you**, see 68.)

B **a/an** and **one** (pronoun)

one is the pronoun equivalent of **a/an**:
Did you get a ticket? ~ Yes, I managed to get one.
The plural of **one** used in this way is **some**:
Did you get tickets? ~ Yes, I managed to get some.

5 **a little/a few** and **little/few**

- A **a little/little** (adjectives) are used before uncountable nouns:
a little salt/little salt
- a few/few** (adjectives) are used before plural nouns:
a few people/few people
- All four forms can also be used as pronouns, either alone or with *of*:
Sugar? ~ A little, please.
Only a few of these are any good.

- B a little, a few** (adjectives and pronouns)
a little is a small amount, or what the speaker considers a small amount, **a few** is a small number, or what the speaker considers a small number.
only placed before **a little/a few** emphasises that the number or amount really is small in the speaker's opinion:

Only a few of our customers have accounts.

But **quite** placed before **a few** increases the number considerably:

I have quite a few books on art. (quite a lot of books)

- C little and few** (adjectives and pronouns)
little and **few** denote scarcity or lack and have almost the force of a negative:

There was little time for consultation.

Little is known about the side-effects of this drug.

Few towns have such splendid trees.

This use of **little** and **few** is mainly confined to written English (probably because in conversation **little** and **few** might easily be mistaken for **a little/a few**). In conversation, therefore, **little** and **few** are normally replaced by **hardly any**. A negative verb + **much/many** is also possible:

We saw little = We saw hardly anything/We didn't see much.

Tourists come here but few stay overnight =

Tourists come here but hardly any stay overnight.

But **little** and **few** can be used more freely when they are qualified by *so, very, too, extremely, comparatively, relatively etc.* **fewer** (comparative) can also be used more freely.

I'm unwilling to try a drug I know so little about.

They have too many technicians, we have too few.

There are fewer butterflies every year.

- D a little/little** (adverbs)

- 1 a little** can be used:

(a) with verbs: *It rained a little during the night.*

They grumbled a little about having to wait.

(b) with 'unfavourable' adjectives and adverbs:

a little anxious a little unwillingly

a little annoyed a little impatiently

(c) with comparative adjectives or adverbs:

The paper should be a little thicker.

Can't you walk a little faster?

rather could replace **a little** in (b) and can also be used before comparatives (see 42), though **a little** is more usual. In colloquial English **a bit** could be used instead of **a little** in all the above examples.

- 2 little** is used chiefly with **better** or **more** in fairly formal style:

His second suggestion was little (= not much) better than his first.

He was little (= not much) more than a child when his father died.

It can also, in formal English, be placed before certain verbs, for example *expect, know, suspect, think*:

He little expected to find himself in prison.

He little thought that one day . . .

Note also the adjectives *little-known* and *little-used*:

a little-known painter a little-used footpath

6 the (the definite article)

- A Form**
the is the same for singular and plural and for all genders:

the boy the girl the day

the boys the girls the days

- B Use**
The definite article is used:

- 1** When the object or group of objects is unique or considered to be unique:
the earth the sea the sky the equator the stars

- 2 Before a noun which has become definite as a result of being mentioned a second time:
His car struck a tree; you can still see the mark on the tree.
- 3 Before a noun made definite by the addition of a phrase or clause:
the girl in blue the man with the banner
the boy that I met the place where I met him
- 4 Before a noun which by reason of locality can represent only one particular thing:
Ann is in the garden, (the garden of this house)
Please pass the wine, (the wine on the table)
Similarly: *the postman* (the one who comes to us), *the car* (our car), *the newspaper* (the one we read).
- 5 Before superlatives and *first, second* etc. used as adjectives or pronouns, and only:
the first (week) the best day the only way
- C **the** + singular noun can represent a class of animals or things:
The whale is in danger of becoming extinct.
The deep-freeze has made life easier for housewives.
But **man**, used to represent the human race, has no article:
If oil supplies run out, man may have to fall back on the horse.
the can be used before a member of a certain group of people:
The small shopkeeper is finding life increasingly difficult.
the + singular noun as used above takes a singular verb. The pronoun is **he, she** or **it**:
The first-class traveller pays more so he expects some comfort.
- D **the** + adjective represents a class of persons:
the old = old people in general (see 23)
- E **the** is used before certain proper names of seas, rivers, groups of islands, chains of mountains, plural names of countries, deserts, regions:
the Atlantic the Netherlands
the Thames the Sahara
the Azores the Crimea
the Alps the Riviera
and before certain other names:
the City the Mall the Sudan
the Hague the Strand the Yemen
the is also used before names consisting of noun + **of** + noun:
the Bay of Biscay the Gulf of Mexico
the Cape of Good Hope the United States of America
the is used before names consisting of adjective + noun (provided the adjective is not *east, west* etc.):
the Arabian Gulf the New Forest the High Street
the is used before the adjectives *east/west* etc. + noun in certain names:
the East/West End the East/West Indies
the North/South Pole
but is normally omitted:
South Africa North America West Germany
the, however, is used before *east/west* etc. when these are nouns:
the north of Spain the West (geographical)
the Middle East the West (political)
Compare *Go north* (adverb: in a northerly direction) with *He lives in the north* (noun: an area in the north).
- F **the** is used before other proper names consisting of adjective + noun or noun + **of** + noun:
the National Gallery the Tower of London
It is also used before names of choirs, orchestras, pop groups etc.:
the Bach Choir the Philadelphia Orchestra the Beatles
and before names of newspapers (*The Times*) and ships (*the Great Britain*).

- G **the** with names of people has a very limited use. **the** + plural surname can be used to mean 'the . . . family':
the Smiths = Mr and Mrs Smith (and children)
the + singular name + clause/phrase can be used to distinguish one person from another of the same name:
We have two Mr Smiths. Which do you want? ~ I want the Mr Smith who signed this letter.
the is used before titles containing **of** (*the Duke of York*) but it is not used before other titles or ranks (*Lord Olivier, Captain Cook*), though if someone is referred to by title/rank alone **the** is used:
The earl expected . . . The captain ordered . . .
 Letters written to two or more unmarried sisters jointly may be addressed *The Misses* + surname: *The Misses Smith*.

7 Omission of **the**

- A The definite article is not used:
- 1 Before names of places except as shown above, or before names of people.
 - 2 Before abstract nouns except when they are used in a particular sense;
Men fear death but The death a/the Prime Minister left his party without a leader.
 - 3 After a noun in the possessive case, or a possessive adjective:
the boy's uncle = the uncle of the boy It is my (blue) book = The (blue) book is mine.
 - 4 Before names of meals (but see 3 C):
The Scots have porridge/or breakfast but The wedding breakfast was held in her/other's house.
 - 5 Before names of games: *He plays golf.*
 - 6 Before parts of the body and articles of clothing, as these normally prefer a possessive adjective:
Raise your right hand. fie took off his coat.
 But notice that sentences of the type:
She seized the child's collar.
I patted his shoulder.
The brick hit John's face.
 could be expressed:
She seized the child by the collar.
I patted him on the shoulder.
The brick hit John in the face.
 Similarly in the passive:
He was hit on the head. He was cut in the hand.
- B Note that in some European languages the definite article is used before indefinite plural nouns but that in English **the** is never used in this way:
Women are expected to like babies, (i.e. women in general)
Big hotels all over the world are very much the same.
 If we put **the** before *women* in the first example, it would mean that we were referring to a particular group of women.
- C *nature*, where it means the spirit creating and motivating the world of plants and animals etc., is used without **the**:
If you interfere with nature you will suffer for it.

8 Omission of **the** before **home**, before **church, hospital, prison, school** etc. and before **work, sea and town**

- A **home**
 When *home* is used alone, i.e. is not preceded or followed by a descriptive word or phrase, **the** is omitted:
He is at home.
home used alone can be placed directly after a verb of motion, i.e. it can be treated as an adverb:

He went home. I arrived home after dark.

But when *home* is preceded or followed by a descriptive word or phrase it is treated like any other noun:

They went to their new home.

We arrived at the bride's home.

For some years this was the home of your queen.

A mud hut was the only home he had ever known.

- B** **bed, church, court, hospital, prison, school/college/university**
the is not used before the nouns listed above when these places are visited or used for their primary purpose. We go:

to bed to sleep or as invalids

to hospital as patients

to church to pray

to prison as prisoners

to court as litigants etc.

to school/college/university to study

Similarly we can be:

in *bed*, sleeping or resting

in *hospital* as patients

at *church* as worshippers

at *school* etc. as students

in *court* as witnesses etc.

We can be/get back (or be/get home) *from school/college/university*.

We can leave school, leave hospital, *be released* from prison.

When these places are visited or used for other reasons **the** is necessary:

I went to the church to see the stained glass.

He goes to the prison sometimes to give lectures.

- C** **sea**

We go to *sea* as sailors. To be *at sea* = to be on a voyage (as passengers or crew).

But to go *to* or be *at the sea* = to go to or be *at the seaside*. We can also live *by/near the sea*.

- D** **work and office**

work (= place of work) **is** used without **the**:

He's on his way to work. He is at work.

He isn't back from work yet.

Note that *at work* can also mean 'working'; *hard at work* = working hard:

He's hard at work on a new picture.

office (= place of work) needs **the**: *He is at/in the office.*

To be *in office* (without **the**) means to hold an official (usually political) position. To be *out of office* = to be no longer in power.

- E** **town**

the can be omitted when speaking of the subject's or speaker's own town:

We go to town sometimes to buy clothes.

We were in town last Monday.

9 **this/these, that/those** (demonstrative adjectives and pronouns)

- A** Used as adjectives, they agree with their nouns in number. They are the only adjectives to do this.

This beach was quite empty last year.

This exhibition will be open until the end of May.

These people come from that hotel over there.

What does that notice say?

That exhibition closed a month ago.

He was dismissed on the 13th. That night the factory went on fire.

Do you see those birds at the top of the tree?

this/these/that/those + noun + *of yours/hers etc. or Ann's etc.* is sometimes, for emphasis, used instead of *your/her etc. + noun*:

This diet of mine/My diet isn't having much effect.

That car of Ann 's/Ann's car is always breaking down.

Remarks made with these phrases are usually, though not necessarily always, unfavourable,

- B** **this/these, that/those** used as pronouns:

This is my umbrella. That's yours.

These are the old classrooms. Those are the new ones.

Who's that (man over there)? ~ That's Tom Jones.

After a radio programme:

That was the concerto in C minor by Vivaldi.

this is is possible in introductions:

ANN (to TOM): *This is my brother Hugh.*

ANN (to HUGH): *Hugh, this is Tom Jones.*

TELEPHONE CALLER: *Good morning. This is/I am Tom Jones . . .*

I am is slightly more formal than *This is* and is more likely to be used when the caller is a stranger to the other person. The caller's name + *here* (*Tom here*) is more informal than *This is*. **those** can be followed by a defining relative clause:

Those who couldn't walk were carried on stretchers.

this/that can represent a previously mentioned noun, phrase or clause:

They're digging up my mad. They do this every summer.

He said I wasn't a good wife. Wasn't that a horrible thing to say?

C this/these, that/those used with one/ones

When there is some idea of comparison or selection, the pronoun **one/ones** is often placed after these demonstratives, but it is not essential except when **this** etc. is followed by an adjective:

This chair is too low. I'll sit in that (one).

I like this (one) best.

I like this blue one/these blue ones.

2 Nouns

10 Kinds and function

- A There are four kinds of noun in English:
Common nouns: *dog, man, table*
Proper nouns: *France, Madrid, Mrs Smith, Tom*
Abstract nouns: *beauty, chanty, courage, fear, joy*
Collective nouns: *crowd, flock, group, swarm, team*
- B A noun can function as:
The subject of a verb: *Tom arrived.*
The complement of the verbs **be, become, seem**: *Tom is an actor.*
The object of a verb: *I saw Tom.*
The object of a preposition: *I spoke to Tom.*
A noun can also be in the possessive case: *Tom's books.*

11 Gender

- A Masculine: men, boys and male animals (pronoun **he/they**).
Feminine: women, girls and female animals (pronoun **she/they**).
Neuter: inanimate things, animals whose sex we don't know and sometimes babies whose sex we don't know (pronoun **it/they**).
Exceptions: ships and sometimes cars and other vehicles when regarded with affection or respect are considered feminine. Countries when referred to by name are also normally considered feminine.

*The ship struck an iceberg, which tore a huge hole in her side.
Scotland lost many of her bravest men in two great rebellions.*

- B Masculine/feminine nouns denoting people

1 Different forms;

(a) <i>boy, girl</i>	<i>gentleman, lady</i>	<i>son, daughter</i>
<i>bachelor, spinster</i>	<i>husband, wife</i>	<i>uncle, aunt</i>
<i>bridegroom, bride</i>	<i>man, woman</i>	<i>widower, widow</i>
<i>father, mother</i>	<i>nephew, niece</i>	

Main exceptions:

<i>baby</i>	<i>infant</i>	<i>relative</i>
<i>child</i>	<i>parent</i>	<i>spouse</i>
<i>cousin</i>	<i>relation</i>	<i>teenager</i>
(b) <i>duke, duchess</i>	<i>king, queen</i>	<i>prince, princess</i>
<i>earl, countess</i>	<i>lord, lady</i>	

- 2 The majority of nouns indicating occupation have the same form:

<i>artist</i>	<i>cook</i>	<i>driver</i>	<i>guide</i>
<i>assistant</i>	<i>dancer</i>	<i>doctor</i>	<i>etc.</i>

Main exceptions:

<i>actor, actress</i>	<i>host, hostess</i>
<i>conductor, conductress</i>	<i>manager, manageress</i>
<i>heir, Heiress</i>	<i>steward, stewardess</i>
<i>hero, heroine</i>	<i>waiter, waitress</i>

Also *salesman, saleswoman* etc., but sometimes *-person* is used instead of *-man, -woman*:
salesperson, spokesperson.

- C Domestic animals and many of the larger wild animals have different forms:

<i>bull, cow</i>	<i>duck, drake</i>	<i>ram, ewe</i>	<i>stallion, mare</i>
<i>cock, hen</i>	<i>gander, goose</i>	<i>stag, doe</i>	<i>tiger, tigress</i>
<i>dog, bitch</i>	<i>lion, lioness</i>		

Others have the same form.

12 Plurals

- A The plural of a noun is usually made by adding s to the singular:
day, days dog, dogs house, houses
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.
Other plural forms
- B Nouns ending in o or **ch, sh, ss** or x form their plural by adding **es**:
tomato, tomatoes brush, brushes box, boxes
church, churches kiss, kisses
But words of foreign origin or abbreviated words ending in o add s only:
dynamo, dynamos kimono, kimonos piano, pianos
kilo, kilos photo, photos soprano, sopranos
When es is placed after **ch, sh, ss** or x an extra syllable (/iz/) is added to the spoken word.
- C Nouns ending in y following a consonant form their plural by dropping the y and adding **ies**:
baby, babies country, countries fly, flies lady, ladies
Nouns ending in y following a vowel form their plural by adding s:
boy, boys day, days donkey, donkeys guy, guys
- D 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, scar/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
- E A few nouns form their plural by a vowel change:
foot, feet louse, lice mouse, mice woman, women
goose, geese man, men tooth, teeth
The plurals of *child* and *ox* are *children, oxen*.
- F Names of certain creatures do not change in the plural.
fish is normally unchanged, *fishes* exists but is uncommon. Some types of fish do not normally change in the plural:
carp pike salmon trout
cod plaice squid turbot
mackerel
but if used in a plural sense they would take a plural verb. Others add s:
crabs herrings sardines
eels lobsters sharks
deer and *sheep* do not change: *one sheep, two sheep*.
Sportsmen who shoot *duck, partridge, pheasant* etc. use the same form for singular and plural. But other people normally add **s** for the plural: *ducks, partridges, pheasants*.
The word *game*, used by sportsmen to mean an animal/animals hunted, is always in the singular, and takes a singular verb.
- G A few other words don't change:
aircraft, craft (boat/boats) *quid* (slang for £1)
counsel (barristers working in court)
Some measurements and numbers do not change (see chapter 36).
For uncountable nouns, see 13.
- H Collective nouns, *crew, family, team* etc.. can take a singular or plural verb; singular if we consider the word to mean a single group or unit:
Our team is the best
or plural if we take it to mean a number of individuals:
Our team are wearing their new jerseys.
When a possessive adjective is necessary, a plural verb with **their** is more usual than a singular verb with **its**, though sometimes both are possible:
The Jury is considering its verdict.

The jury are considering their verdict.

- I Certain words are always plural and take a plural verb:
Clothes police
garments consisting of two parts:
breeches pants pyjama trousers etc.
and tools and instruments consisting of two parts:
binoculars pliers scissors spectacles
glasses scales shears etc.
Also certain other words including:
arms (weapons) particulars
damages (compensation) premises/quarters
earnings riches
goods/wares savings
greens (vegetables) spirits (alcohol)
grounds stairs
outskirts surroundings
pains (trouble/effort) valuables
- J A number words ending in **ics**, *acoustics, athletics, ethics, hysterics, mathematics, 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.
- K Words plural in form but singular in meaning include *news*:
The news is good
certain diseases:
mumps rickets shingles
and certain games:
billiards darts draughts bowls dominoes
- L 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
erratum, errata radius, radii
memorandum, memoranda terminus, termini
oasis, oases
But some follow the English rules:
dogma, dogmas gymnasium, gymnasiums
formula, formulas (though *formulae* is used by scientists)
Sometimes there are two plural forms with different meanings:
appendix, appendixes or appendices (medical terms)
appendix, appendices (addition/s to a book)
index, indexes (in books), *indices* (in mathematics)
Musicians usually prefer Italian plural forms for Italian musical terms:
libretto, libretti tempo, tempi
But *s* is also possible: *librettos, tempos*.
- M Compound nouns
- 1 Normally the last word is made plural:
boy-friends break-ins travel agents
But where *man* and *woman* is prefixed both parts are made plural:
men drivers women drivers
- 2 The first word is made plural with compounds formed of verb + **er** nouns + adverbs:
hangers-on lookers-on runners-up
and with compounds composed of noun + preposition + noun:
ladies-in-waiting sisters-in-law wards of court
- 3 Initials can be made plural:
MPs (Members of Parliament)
VIPs (very important persons)
OAPs (old age pensioners)
UFOs (unidentified flying objects)

13 Uncountable nouns (also known as non-count nouns or mass nouns)

A 1 Names of substances considered generally:

<i>bread</i>	<i>cream</i>	<i>gold</i>	<i>paper</i>	<i>tea</i>
<i>beer</i>	<i>dust</i>	<i>ice</i>	<i>sand</i>	<i>wafer</i>
<i>cloth</i>	<i>gin</i>	<i>jam</i>	<i>soap</i>	<i>wine</i>
<i>coffee</i>	<i>glass</i>	<i>oil</i>	<i>stone</i>	<i>wood</i>

2 Abstract nouns:

<i>advice</i>	<i>experience</i>	<i>horror</i>	<i>pity</i>
<i>beauty</i>	<i>fear</i>	<i>information</i>	<i>relief</i>
<i>courage</i>	<i>help</i>	<i>knowledge</i>	<i>suspicion</i>
<i>death</i>	<i>hope</i>	<i>mercy</i>	<i>work</i>

3 Also considered uncountable in English:

<i>baggage</i>	<i>damage</i>	<i>luggage</i>	<i>shopping</i>
<i>camping</i>	<i>furniture</i>	<i>parking</i>	<i>weather</i>

These, with hair, information, knowledge, news, rubbish, are sometimes countable in other languages.

B Uncountable nouns are always singular and are not used with **a/an**:

I don't want (any) advice or help. I want (some) information.
He has had no experience in this sort of work.

These nouns are often preceded by **some, any, no, a little** etc. or by nouns such as bit, piece, slice etc. + **of**:

<i>a bit of news</i>	<i>a grain of sand</i>	<i>a pot of jam</i>
<i>a cake of soap</i>	<i>a pane of glass</i>	<i>a sheet of paper</i>
<i>a drop of oil</i>	<i>a piece of advice</i>	

C Many of the nouns in the above groups can be used in a particular sense and are then countable and can take a/an in the singular. 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 drink beer, coffee, gin, but we can ask for a (cup of) coffee, a gin, two gins etc. We drink out of glasses. We can walk in 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 singular:

He is looking/or work/for a job. I do homework.
She does housework.

But roadworks means 'repair of roads'.

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.

D Some abstract nouns can be used in a particular sense with **a/an**, but in the singular only:

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.

E **a fear/fears, a hope/hopes, a suspicion/suspicious**

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 suspicion that. . .

Something can arouse a *fear/fears*, a *hope/hopes*, a *suspicion/suspicious*.

14 The form of the possessive/genitive case

A 's is used with singular nouns and plural nouns not ending in s:

<i>a man's job</i>	<i>the people's choice</i>
<i>men's work</i>	<i>the crew's quarters</i>
<i>a woman's intuition</i>	<i>the horse's mouth</i>
<i>the butcher's (shop)</i>	<i>the bull's horns</i>
<i>a child's voice</i>	<i>women's clothes</i>
<i>the children's room</i>	<i>Russia's exports</i>

B A simple apostrophe (') is used with plural nouns ending in s:

<i>a girls' school</i>	<i>the students' hostel</i>
<i>the eagles' nest</i>	<i>the Smiths' car</i>

C Classical names ending in s usually add only the apostrophe:

Pythagoras' Theorem *Archimedes' Law* *Sophocles' plays*

D Other names ending in s can take 's or the apostrophe alone;

Mr Jones's (w Mr Jones' house) *Yeats's (or Yeats') poems*

E With compounds, the last word takes the 's:

my brother-in-law's guitar

Names consisting of several words are treated similarly:

Henry the Eighth's wives *the Prince of Wales's helicopter*

's can also be used after initials:

the PM's secretary *the MP's briefcase* *the VIP's escort*

Note that when the possessive case is used, the article before the person or thing 'possessed' disappears:

the daughter of the politician = *the politician's daughter*
the intervention of America = *America's intervention*
the plays of Shakespeare = *Shakespeare's plays*

15 Use of the possessive/genitive case and of + noun

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

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 train's heating system* or *the heating system of the train*

3 In time expressions:

<i>a week's holiday</i>	<i>today's paper</i>	<i>tomorrow's weather</i>
<i>in two years' time</i>	<i>ten minutes' break</i>	<i>two hours' delay</i>

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.

8 Sometimes certain nouns can be used in the possessive case without the second noun. *a/the baker's/butcher's/chemist's/florist's* etc. can mean 'a/the baker's/butcher's etc. shop'. Similarly, *a/the house agent's/travel agent's* etc. (office) and *the dentist 's/doctor 's/vet 's* (surgery):

You can buy it at the chemist's. *He's going to the dentist's.*

Names of the owners of some businesses can be used similarly:

Sotheby's, Claridge'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.*

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