
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Vocabulary

Uncountable nouns



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello! Welcome to 6 Minute Vocabulary. I'm Neil.

Catherine

And I'm Catherine. In this show we're talking about uncountable nouns.

Neil

Yes, we are. So that's nouns that you can't count, like **water**, **money** and **research**. We'll show you plenty of examples...

Catherine

...and we'll also bring you a top tip for recognising uncountable nouns.

Neil

But let's start by listening to Colin. He's a travel agent.

Catherine

While you listen, think about this question: what might you need from your bank before you go abroad? Here's Colin.

INSERT

Colin

It's time to start planning your summer **travel!** Do some **research** before you go. Are there good reviews of the **accommodation**? How much **baggage** can you take and what's the best way to take **money** abroad? Do you need to get some **advice** from your bank? Will the **traffic** be bad on the way to the airport?

Neil

So that was Colin. We asked you: What might you need from your bank before you go abroad?

Catherine

And the answer is: You might need some **advice**.

Neil

That's right: **some advice**. **Advice** means ideas and suggestions about what to do. Now, did you notice that **advice** is not plural? We never say **advices** in English because **advice** is an uncountable noun. You can't make **advice** plural, like you can in some other languages.

Catherine

And with uncountable nouns, we don't use articles **a** or **an**. We say **some advice**, not **an advice**. Now listen out for three more uncountable nouns in this clip.

INSERT

Colin

It's time to start planning your summer **travel**! Do some **research** before you go. Are there good reviews of the **accommodation**?

Catherine

And the uncountable nouns in that clip were: **travel**, **research** and **accommodation**.

Neil

And activities like **travel**, **work** and **homework** are usually uncountable.

Catherine

Information words like **research**, **information** and **advice** are uncountable too.

Neil

Yes, they're not usually plural in English, but we can add the words **a piece of** to lots of uncountable nouns if we like. So we can say **a piece of information** or **two pieces of advice**.

Catherine

That's right. The other uncountable noun in that clip was **accommodation**. **Accommodation** means 'places to live or spend the night', like rooms, flats and houses.

Neil

So **accommodation** describes the groups of places that you can stay like flats, houses, students halls of residence. And group words are often uncountable, so there's no plural form. **Fruit**, **food** and **weather** are group words too. We don't usually say **fruits**, **foods** and **weathers**.

Catherine

That's right. Now, let's have another clip. Can you spot any more uncountable nouns?

INSERT CLIP 2

How much **baggage** can you take and what's the best way to take **money** abroad? Will the **traffic** be bad on the way to the airport?

Catherine

And we had **baggage**, **money** and **traffic**. In some languages these words are often plural...

Neil

...but not in English. In English, they are all group words.

Catherine

That's right. So **baggage** means a group of bags...

Neil

It's **money** for coins or notes...

Catherine

And **traffic** for cars, lorries, buses.

STING

Neil

And we're talking about uncountable nouns. We've seen that some activity nouns are uncountable, and some group nouns are uncountable. Shall we now talk about more types of uncountable nouns, Catherine?

Catherine

Go on then. So we've got liquids and gases. **Water** and **air** are uncountable.

Neil

Yes, they are. Materials and substances like **wood** and **salt** are uncountable too.

Catherine

Then there are words for feelings and ideas, so **happiness** and **education**...

Neil

And also subjects like **history** and **biology**.

Catherine

That's right. But be careful with subjects like **physics** or **economics**.

Neil

Yes, they end with the letter **-s**, so they look plural, but in fact they're usually uncountable too.

Catherine

So we use them with a singular verb, just like other uncountable nouns. **Physics is** complicated...

Neil

...and Economics **isn't** easy.

IDENT

6 Minute Vocabulary from BBC Learning English

Catherine

And it's quiz time! Number one: Is the word **furniture** countable or uncountable?

Neil

And the answer is - it's uncountable. It's a group word like **baggage**. It means things like tables and chairs.

Catherine

Very good. And number two: is this sentence correct or wrong? Please can you give me some informations?

Neil

That is not correct. **Information** is uncountable so it's **some information** without an -s, not **some informations**.

Catherine.

Very good! And the last one: Which is correct: a) it was beautiful weather on Saturday. Or b) it was a beautiful weather on Saturday.

Neil

The answer's a) it was beautiful weather on Saturday.

Catherine

And that's the end of the quiz. Well done to you if you got them all right.

Neil

But before we go, here's a tip. When you see a noun, think carefully about whether it belongs to one of these types: activity words, information words or group words. If it does, then it's probably uncountable.

Catherine

There's more about this at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again soon for more 6 Minute Vocabulary.

Both

Bye!

Vocabulary points to take away

Uncountable nouns have no plural form and are not used with the indefinite article **a** or **an**.
Can you give me **some information** about **accommodation** in the city?

There are three main types of uncountable nouns that students often think are countable:

activity nouns: **travel, work, homework**

information nouns: **advice, information, knowledge, research**

group nouns: **accommodation, baggage, furniture, money, traffic, weather**

Other nouns that are uncountable are:

liquids and gasses: **water, air**

materials and substances: **wood, rice**

feelings and ideas: **happiness, education**

subjects: **geography, history, economics**

A few uncountable nouns look plural because they end in **-s**. But they use a singular verb like other uncountable nouns:

Physics is a very interesting subject.