

Nouns are the names of things, places or people. We normally divide nouns into proper and common nouns.

Proper and common nouns:

Proper nouns are the names of people and places. They always start with a capital letter: Spain, Madrid, George...

Common nouns are the names of things: chair, boy, father, car...

Number - singular and plural:

The majority of (countable) nouns have a singular and plural form, but some nouns are only plural: clothes, thanks, glasses, pyjamas, jeans, shorts, trousers, scissors...:

These clothes are new. / My glasses are broken.

With singular nouns we use “a/an” but not with plural nouns:

a car - cars, a box - boxes, a man - men.

Rules:

1. We normally form plural nouns by adding -s: *student - students.*

2. If the noun ends in the following ways, we add -es:

sounds /s, z, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ/ or typically spellings -s, -z, -sh, -ch, -x: *kiss-kisses, church-churches, box-boxes.* Here the pronunciation of -es is [ɪz].

-o (except foreign words): *tomato - tomatoes.* Exceptions: photo-photos, piano-pianos, kilo-kilos, radio-radios, video-videos, studio-studios.

consonant + y (the -y- changes into -i): *family - families, baby-babies.*

-f or -fe (the -f changes into -v): *wife - wives.* Exceptions: roof-roofs, belief-beliefs, giraffe-giraffes, cliff-cliffs.

3. Some nouns have irregular plural forms because the plural doesn't finish in -s:

a) Some nouns have two different forms, one for the singular and another for the plural: *person - people, woman - women, man - men, child - children, ox - oxen, mouse - mice, louse - lice, goose - geese, tooth - teeth, foot - feet, penny - pence/ pennies.*

b) Some nouns have the same form for both singular and plural: *cod, deer, fish, goldfish* (also: *goldfishes*), *reindeer, salmon, sheep, dice ...*

Pronunciation of the regular plural:

▪ If the noun ends in one of the following sounds /s, z, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ/, the ending is pronounced [ɪz]:

[s] *classes, boxes*

[tʃ] *churches*

[dʒ] *languages*

▪ Nouns ending in vowels and voiced consonants add [z]:

Vowel: *families*, consonant /l/: *tables*, consonant /n/: *televisions.*

▪ Nouns ending in voiceless consonants add [s]:

Consonant /t/: *cats*, consonant /k/: *parks*, consonant /p/: *hopes.*

Gender:

In general there is no distinction between masculine and feminine in English nouns. However, some nouns are classified as masculine, feminine or dual according to their relation with personal pronouns.

Masculine nouns are those for which we use the pronoun “he”: *brother.*

Feminine nouns are those for which we use the pronoun “she”: *sister.*

Dual nouns are those for which we can use “he” or “she”: *sibling.*

With dual nouns, if we want to give information on the sex of the person, we can add the words “male/female”: e.g. a male student; a female cousin. For professions, we can add the word “woman”: a woman doctor; a woman journalist.

Countable and uncountable nouns:

Normally nouns in English are divided into countable and uncountable.

▪ **Countable/count** nouns are those that we can count. Therefore, they can occur in the singular and in the plural. We can use the article “a/an” with them: [a newspaper/ newspapers/ three newspapers](#).

Some determiners can only be used with countable nouns, for example, *many*, *few*: [How many hours do you work?](#)

▪ **Uncountable/ uncount or mass** nouns are those that we cannot count. They are the names of liquids, masses, abstract things, etc. which we see as masses, not as separate objects. Most of them are singular and don't have plural forms.

We can't use “a/an” with uncountable nouns because they are uncountable. Examples:

water (NOT: ~~a water, waters~~)

He speaks excellent English. (NOT ~~an excellent English~~)

We're having terrible weather. (NOT ~~a terrible weather~~)

Some determiners can only be used with uncountable nouns, for example, *much*, *little*: [How much money do you earn?](#)

Frequent uncountable nouns:

▪ liquids: shampoo, water, whisky, wine, rain, beer, juice, coke, milk, tea, petrol ...

▪ masses: butter, cheese, ice, flour, toothpaste, marmalade, yoghurt, chocolate (but *a chocolate* is something different), rice, salt, soup, spaghetti (*macaroni* and other pasta food), sugar, wood...

▪ abstract things: love, intelligence, freedom, health, luck, beauty...

▪ other uncountable nouns:

advice, air, bread, chewing gum, food, fruit, furniture, gold, homework, housework, information, baggage/luggage (but: a case, a bag), meat, beef, steak (but: a chicken), money (but: a note, a coin, a euro, a dollar, a pound), music, news, toast, traffic, travel (but: a journey, a trip), work (but: a job), weather.

▪ **Notice:** some nouns have countable and uncountable uses, sometimes with a difference in meaning:

[I need some paper to write on.](#) (U) - [I'm going out to buy a paper.](#) (=a newspaper) (C)

[The window is made of unbreakable glass.](#) (U) - [Would you like a glass of water?](#) (C)

[I haven't got time.](#) (U) - [I've been to La Gomera many times.](#) (C)

[I don't like chocolate.](#) (U) - [Would you like a chocolate?](#) (C)

[Have you got any coffee?](#) (U) - [Could I have two coffees?](#) (= two cups of coffee; C)

[I always have sugar in my tea.](#) (U) - [Three sugars in my tea, please.](#) (= three spoonfuls; C)

[Have a piece of cake, please.](#) (U) - [I baked a cake for you.](#) (C)

[Her hair is red.](#) (U) - [There's a hair in my tea.](#) (C)

▪ **Expressions to “count” uncountable nouns:** when we want to “count” an uncountable noun, we always use an expression. For example: a piece of / two pieces of/ four pieces of advice; a gram of/ 200 grams of cheese, etc:

- a bag of/ three bags of/ four bags of ... tea

- a bar of... chocolate

- a bottle of... milk/ shampoo/ whisky/ orange juice/ water

- a bowl of ... fruit/ rice/ soup

- a can of... coke / beer

- a carton of... yoghurt/ orange juice/ milk

- a cup/ mug of... tea /coffee

- a glass of... water / beer/ wine

- a jar of... coffee/ marmalade/ jam/ mayonnaise/ honey

- a joint of... beef/ ham/ lamb

- a jug of ... lemonade/ milk/ water
- a loaf of... bread
- a packet of... rice/ salt/spaghetti/ tea/ sugar
- a piece of... advice/ baggage/ luggage/ bread/ cake/ cheese/ chewing gum/ furniture/ fruit/ homework/ housework/ information/ news/ spaghetti/ steak/ toast/ work/ wood
- a sack of ... potatoes
- a slice of... toast/ bread/ cake/ cheese/ ham
- a tin of... soup/ tuna/ paint
- a tube of... toothpaste/ tomato paste
- a gram of/ half a kilo of/ a kilo of/ a pound of (pound= 0,45 kg.) ... butter/ cheese / coffee/ flour/ sugar
- a spoonful of... sugar/ jam; a teaspoon / teaspoonful (tsp) of ... sugar/ salt
- a litre of... milk/ coke/ petrol

The possessive form of nouns:

- Pronunciation of the possessive form 's:

SINGULAR NOUNS:

- If the noun ends in one of the following sounds /s, z, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ dʒ/, the ending is pronounced [ɪz]:
 - [s] Tess's [tesɪz] car, Alice's house, the class' results.
 - [z] Rose's [rəʊzɪz] car, Liz's house.
 - [ʃ] Rush's [rʌʃɪz] car.
 - [ʒ] final [ʒ] is rare at the end of nouns.
 - [tʃ] Butch's [bʊtʃɪz] car, the witch's broomstick.
 - [dʒ] Midge's [mɪdʒɪz] car, George's house.

With proper nouns ending in -s, we can find:

Charles's car (pronounced /'tʃɑ:lzɪz/)
 Charles' car (pronounced/tʃɑ:lz/)

- Nouns ending in vowels and voiced consonants add [z]:
 - Meg's [megz] car, my dog's collar.
 - Jim's [dʒɪmz] car.
 - Spain's [speɪnz] population, London's traffic problems.
- Nouns ending in voiceless consonants add [s]:
 - Pat's [pæts] car, my cat's collar.
 - Hope's [həʊps] car.

PLURAL NOUNS:

- When the noun is regular, the plural finishes with "s", so its pronunciation finishes with /s/ or /z/. However, this noun is not pronounced with /ɪz/. So there is no distinction between the pronunciation of a regular plural noun in the possessive and the pronunciation of a singular noun in the possessive:
 - e.g. "The girls' bikes" is pronounced the same as "the girl's bikes"
 - e.g. "my parents' house" is pronounced the same as "my parent's house"

▪ **Form of the possessive:**

1. We use the possessive form 's when the possessor is a person, an animal or a country/place. To form the possessive, we add 's to the noun:

POSSESSOR:	POSSESSOR + 'S + THE THING POSSESSED
person	It's George's car.
animal	The cat's dinner is ready.
place (country, city, town...)	Spain's beaches are beautiful. London's traffic problems are difficult to solve.

2. When the noun ends in -s (e.g. regular plurals), we just add an apostrophe:

POSSESSOR:	POSSESSOR + ' + THE THING POSSESSED
ends in -s	My parents' house is very big.
	The girls' T-shirts are red.

Notice: the possessive here is not pronounced /iz/.

3. For names that end in -s, it is possible to use either 's or just '. 's is more frequent:

POSSESSOR:	POSSESSOR + 'S / ' + THE THING POSSESSED
name in -s	That is Thomas's book. / That is Thomas' book.
	This is Charles's brother. / This is Charles' brother.

Notice: the pronunciation depends on the spelling you use:

Charles's brother (pronounced /'tʃɑ:lzɪz/)

Charles' brother (pronounced /tʃɑ:lz/)

4. When the possessor has more than one word, we place the 's at the end of the last word:

POSSESSOR:	POSSESSOR, POSSESSOR + 'S + THE THING POSSESSED
two or more	Eve and Jane's bikinis are nice.
	Mr and Mrs Roberts's yacht is big.

5. We use the possessive form in time expressions:

TIME EXPRESSIONS	TIME WORD + 'S/ ' + NOUN
adverb (today, tomorrow...)	Today's newspaper has arrived.
a + noun (a day/ a month...)	I'm going to have a month's holiday.
next/last + noun (week/month...)	Next week's party will be indoors.
in ... time	The lessons start in three weeks' time.

6. We use the possessive without a thing possessed when the meaning is clear, for example, when we refer to shops, someone's home, restaurants, churches, schools... So we only use the name or job title of the owner:

POSSESSED THING (not mentioned)	POSSESSOR + 'S
shop/ surgery	Go to the baker's/ the grocer's/ the newsagent's. She's at the doctor's/ the dentist's/ the chemist's.
home	I'm staying at my aunt's.
restaurant	We are going to Luigi's for lunch.
church	Saint James's is a nice church.
school	Saint Mary's is an all-girls school.

7. When the possessor is a thing (not a person, animal, country or place), we use the construction **the thing possessed + of + possessor**:

POSSESSOR:	THE THING POSSESSED + OF + POSSESSOR
thing	The door <u>of</u> the house is blue.
	The legs <u>of</u> the chair are short.

▪ **Meanings:**

The possessive form mainly expresses the meanings of “ownership” or “belonging to”, that is, it shows that something belongs to somebody or something.

It is Monica's house. (=Monica is the possessor or owner)

But it can also express other meanings:

- a family relationship: *Monica's mother*
- parts of the body: *the patient's leg*
- places: *Asia's largest capital cities*
- time: *two days' holiday*
- where someone works, studies or spends time:

This is Monica's school.

This is Anne's room.

- qualities: *Bill's intelligence is surprising.* (=Bill is intelligent)

▪ We use “whose” to ask about possession:

Whose car is that? - It's Bill's. / It's mine.