Count / Non-Count Nouns

Knowing the differenxce between count and non-xcount nouns will help you do the following:

- Use the noun plural ending **-s** correctly
  See PLURALIZING in the following link:
  https://leo.stcloudstate.edu/grammar/countnon.html#plural
  LEO: Literacy Education Online, 1999
- Use the appropriate type of article: definite (**the**) or indefinite (**a** or **an**)
  See ARTICLES in the following link:
  https://leo.stcloudstate.edu/grammar/countnon.html#article
  LEO: Literacy Education Online, 1999
- Use words that express quantities, such as **little**, **much**, . . .

Count vs. Non-count

The main difference between count and non count nouns is whether or not the things they refer to can be counted.

Count nouns refer to things that can be divided up into smaller units, which are separate and distinct from one another. They usually refer to what can individually be seen or heard:

- table
- chair
- word
- remark
- finger
- bottle
- award
- candidate

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Non-count nouns refer to things that cannot be counted because they are regarded as wholes, which cannot be divided into parts. They often refer to abstractions and occasionally have a collective meaning:

- anger
- furniture
- warmth
- leisure

- education
- courage
- progress
- weather

Illustration: think of the batter from which a cake is made. Before putting the batter into the oven, you cannot divide it into its parts because it is a liquid mix. Once it has been baked, however, it becomes solid enough to be cut into pieces. Think of non-count nouns as the batter, which forms a mass, and think of the pieces of cake as the count nouns, which may be numbered and distributed.

Pluralizing

The Rules

- Count nouns can be pluralized by adding a final **-s** to the nouns.
- Non-count nouns cannot be not pluralized at all.

This rule works for the nouns listed above.

Exception: the rule needs to be slightly revised for a number of nouns. Certain nouns in English belong to both classes: they have both a non-count and a count meaning. Normally, the non-count meaning is abstract and general, and the count meaning is concrete and specific.

Count / Non-Count Nouns

Compare the changes in meaning of the following nouns if they work as count or non-count nouns:

Count	Non-count
The researcher had to overcome some specific problems to collect the data.	The researcher had no problem finding studies that supported his view.
The political arguments took the nation to a situation of political instability.	The author's argument was unsupported and stereotypical.
There were bright lights and harsh sounds.	Light travels faster than sound.

Special Case: a special case is the use of the mass/count distinction for the purpose of classification. The nouns, which function both ways mainly, denote foods and beverages: food(s), drink(s), wine(s), bread(s), coffee(s), and fruit(s).

Examples:

Units	Mass
Several types of French wines are grown in the French Riviera.	The crops of Columbia coffee are more resistant to dry climate than are the crops of Brazilian coffee.

Count / Non-Count Nouns

A Revision of the Rules

The exceptions require that the rule for pluralizing be revised: count nouns and nouns used in a count sense can be pluralized; non-count nouns and nouns used in a non-count sense cannot.

	Pluralizes with -s	Does not pluralize
Count Noun	X	
Count Use	X	
Non-count Noun		X
Non-count Use		X