

ARTICLES

Proper nouns name specific persons or places and begin with capital letters (Walter, Mrs. Grundy, London). Titles of books or movies (*Pride and Prejudice*, *Gone With the Wind*) are treated as proper nouns as well. All other nouns are **common nouns**, of which there are two kinds: **count and noncount nouns**.

Count nouns refer to things that can be separated into individual units and thus counted: *one house / two houses; one train / seven trains*. Count nouns have plurals and usually refer to things that can be seen, heard, smelled, touched, tasted, or smelled.

Noncount nouns refer to things that cannot be counted (*oil, milk, gas*); many of these are abstractions (*patience, advice*); many foods are noncount nouns (*milk, pasta, bread, wine*). Noncount nouns do not have plurals; many have a collective meaning (furniture, clothing). If you want to give an amount of a noncount noun, use a count noun first: *a quart of milk, a gallon of gas*.

Some nouns can be used as both count and noncount nouns, but their meaning changes: if they are used as count nouns, they refer to something specific; if they are used as noncount nouns, their meaning is general.

*The **exercises** were difficult to do.* (count; specific)

***Exercise** will keep you healthy.* (noncount; general)

*There were bright **lights** in the sky.* (count; specific)

*Those plants need more **light**.* (noncount; general)

- **Proper nouns do not need articles.**
*Jacob Green, a character in Joshua Braff's *The Unthinkable Thoughts of Jacob Green*, constantly disobeys his father's wishes. He lives in New York.*
- **Singular count nouns need an article. Use the (definite article) if you are talking about a specific person or thing.**
The old man inside the deli will take care of the ruckus.
- **Use a/an (indefinite article) if you are talking about a non-specific person or thing. A precedes consonants (a dish, a house); an precedes vowels or letters pronounced as vowels (an apple, an evening, an honorable woman)**
*Asher wants to buy a car and marry an honest girl.
Jacob took the bus to school rather than waiting for Mother to find a parking spot nearby.
Jacob arrived at the baseball game in a beat-up Chevy.*
- **Plural count nouns do not need articles.**
*Baseball cards have sleeves; comic books have safe rooms.
Asher loves cars, girlss, and latkes.*
- **Noncount nouns do not usually need an article.**
*Jacob does not really like **chicken**.
Asher needed **light** in the garage.*
- **However, if noncount nouns have modifiers (words or word groups that describe the nouns and thus make them more specific), they take a definite article (*the*).**
*The chicken Mother bought last week has already turned a horrible color.
Asher never gets tired of looking at the dim light in the garage.*

► Did you like the sample sentences? Get the whole story in Joshua Braff's *The Unthinkable Thoughts of Jacob Green*.