THE NONCOUNT NOUN

Recognize a noncount noun when you find one.

Nouns name people, places, and things. Many nouns have both a singular and a plural form: *a surfer*/*surfers*, *a restaurant*/*restaurants*, *a pickle*/*pickles*. Some nouns, however, have only a singular form; you cannot add a number before or an *s* to the end of these words. This group of nouns is called noncount.

Read these examples:

> After two months of **rainstorms**, Fred carries his umbrella everywhere in anticipation of more bad **weather**.

> *Rainstorms* = count noun; *weather* = noncount noun.

> Because Big Toe Joe has ripped all four **chairs** with his claws, Diane wants to buy new **furniture** and then find the cat another home.

> *Chairs* = count noun; *furniture* = noncount noun.

> When Professor Russell postponed the date of the research paper, **smiles** lit up the faces of her students, filling the room with their **happiness**.

> *Smiles* = count noun; *happiness* = noncount noun.

> Because the beautiful Josephine will help Pablo with his calculus **assignments**, he never minds the **homework** from Professor Ribley's class.

> *Assignments* = count noun; *homework* = noncount noun.

Know the different categories of noncount nouns.

The chart below illustrates the different types of noncount nouns. These categories also include nouns that are count. For example, *lightning*, a natural event (one of the categories), is noncount, but *hurricane*, a different natural event, is a count noun.

When you don't know what type of noun you have, **consult a dictionary** that provides such information.

CATEGORY	EXAMPLES
Abstractions	advice, courage, enjoyment, fun, help, honesty, information, intelligence, knowledge, patience, etc.
Activities	chess, homework, housework, music, reading, singing, sleeping, soccer, tennis, work, etc.
Food	beef, bread, butter, fish, macaroni, meat, popcorn, pork, poultry, toast, etc.
Gases	air, exhaust, helium, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, pollution, smog, smoke, steam, etc.
Groups of Similar Items	baggage, clothing, furniture, hardware, luggage, equipment, mail, money, software, vocabulary, etc.
Liquids	blood, coffee, gasoline, milk, oil, soup, syrup, tea, water, wine, etc.
Natural Events	electricity, gravity, heat, humidity, moonlight, rain, snow, sunshine, thunder, weather, etc.
Materials	aluminum, asphalt, chalk, cloth, concrete, cotton, glue, lumber, wood, wool, etc.
Particles or Grains	corn, dirt, dust, flour, hair, pepper, rice, salt, sugar, wheat, etc.

Know how to indicate number with noncount nouns.

Thunder, a noncount noun, cannot have an *s* added at the end. You can, however, lie awake in bed counting the number of times that you hear thunder boom during a storm.

When you want to indicate number with a noncount word, you have two options. First, you can put *of* in front of the noncount word—for example, *of thunder*—and then attach the resulting **prepositional phrase** to an appropriate count word.

> Kristina heard seven **claps of thunder**.

A second option is to make the noncount noun an **adjective** that you place before a **count noun**. Then you could write a sentence like this:

> **Thunderheads** filled the sky.

Here are more examples:

NONCOUNT NOUN	COUNTABLE VERSION
advice	pieces of advice
homework	homework assignments
bread	loaves of bread, slices of bread
smoke	puffs of smoke, plumes of smoke
software	software applications
wine	bottles of wine, glasses of wine
snow	snowstorms, snowflakes, snow drifts
cloth	bolts of cloth, yards of cloth
dirt	piles of dirt, truckloads of dirt

Some nouns are both noncount and count.

Sometimes a word that means one thing as a noncount noun has a slightly different meaning if it also has a countable version. Remember, then, that the classifications *count* and *noncount* are not absolute.

Time is a good example. When you use this word to mean the unceasing flow of experience that includes past, present, and future, with no distinct beginning or end, then *time* is a noncount noun.

Read this example:

> **Time** dragged as Simon sat through yet another boring chick flick with his girlfriend Roseanne.

> *Time* = noncount because it has no specific beginning and, for poor Simon, no foreseeable end.

When *time* refers to a specific experience which starts at a certain moment and ends after a number of countable units (minutes, hours, days, etc.), then the noun is *count*.

Here is an example:

> On his last trip to Disney World, Joe rode Space Mountain twenty-seven **times**.

> *Times* = count because a ride on Space Mountain is a measurable unit of experience, one that you can clock with a stopwatch.