

The Noun

Recognize a *noun* when you see one.

George! Jupiter! Ice cream! Courage! Books! Bottles! Godzilla! All of these words are *nouns*, words that identify the whos, wheres, and whats in language. Nouns name people, places, and things. Read the sentence that follows:

George and **Godzilla** walked to **Antonio's** to order a large pepperoni **pizza**.

George is a person. **Antonio's** is a place. **Pizza** is a thing. **Godzilla** likes to think he's a person, is as big as a place, but qualifies as another thing.

Understand the functions that nouns provide in sentences.

Nouns can function as subjects, direct objects, indirect objects, objects of prepositions, and subject complements. Check out these examples:

Godzilla ordered a large pepperoni pizza and ate the pie in a single bite.

Godzilla = the subject for the verbs **ordered** and **ate**.

George offered **Godzilla** a ten-dollar **loan** to buy a second pizza.

Godzilla = the indirect object of **offered**; **loan** = the direct object of **offered**.

While eating a piece of pizza, George dripped tomato sauce onto his **shirt**.

Shirt = the object of the preposition **onto**.

In Godzilla's opinion, George is a **slob**.

Slob = subject complement of the linking verb **is**.

Know the different classes of nouns.

Nouns have different classes: proper and common, concrete and abstract, count and noncount, and collective.

Proper nouns name *specific*, one-of-a-kind items while common nouns identify the *general* varieties. Proper nouns always begin with capital letters; common nouns, on the other hand, only require capitalization if they start the sentence or are part of a title. Read these two versions:

George and **Godzilla** dined at **Antonio's**.

George, Godzilla, Antonio's = proper nouns.

A **boy** and his **monster** dined at a pizza **restaurant**.

Boy, monster, restaurant = common nouns.

You classify concrete and abstract nouns by their ability to register on your five senses. If you can see, hear, smell, taste, or feel the item, it's a concrete noun. If, however, you cannot experience the item with any of your senses, it's abstract. Here are two examples:

Pizza is Godzilla's favorite food.

Pizza = concrete because you can see, hear, smell, feel [though you get your fingers greasy], and thankfully taste it.

Godzilla never tips the delivery boy from Antonio's; **politeness** is not one of Godzilla's strong points.

Politeness = abstract [you cannot see **politeness**, or hear, smell, taste, or touch the quality itself].

Many nouns can be singular or plural; these are count nouns. Noncount nouns, on the other hand, have only a singular form; to make them plural is illogical. Read the sentences that follow:

Godzilla ate three **pizzas**, two delivery **boys**, and six parked **cars**.

Pizzas, boys, and cars = count nouns. Godzilla didn't have to be such a pig; he could have eaten only *one* pizza, *one* delivery boy, and *one* car.

After overindulging at Antonio's, Godzilla got severe **indigestion**.

Indigestion = noncount. You *cannot* write, "Godzilla got eleven indigestions."

Collective nouns name groups. Although the group is a single unit, it has more than one member. Some examples are **army, audience, board, cabinet, class, committee, company, corporation, council, department, faculty, family, firm, group, jury, majority, minority, navy, public, school, society, team,** and **troupe**.

Collective nouns are especially tricky when you are trying to make verbs and pronouns agree with them. The reason is that collective nouns can be singular or plural, depending on the behavior of the members of the group.

For example, if the members are acting as a unit—everyone doing the same thing at the same time—the collective noun is *singular* and requires singular verbs and pronouns. Read this example:

Despite the danger to **its** new van, the SWAT **team pursues** the pizza-eating Godzilla through the streets of Miami.

In this sentence, the members of the collective noun **team** are acting in unison; each officer is engaged in the same activity at the same time. Thus, **its**, a singular pronoun, and **pursues**, a singular verb, are required. Now read the next example:

After getting **their** butts kicked by Godzilla, the **team change** into **their** street clothes and sob in **their** cars on the way home.

Here, the team members are acting individually. They are not putting on one giant set of street clothes that covers them all. They are not in unison pulling on their left socks first, then their right socks second. Instead, each member is dressing as he wishes, driving his own car to his own home. In cases like this, the collective noun is plural and requires plural pronouns [like **their**] and plural verbs [like **change**].

Keep in mind that a single noun can fall into more than one class. Here is an example:

Godzilla has known five **Georges** in his life.

Georges = proper, concrete, and count.



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