Concrete and Abstract

Nouns

All **nouns** serve to name a person, place, or thing. Depending on whether they name a **tangible** or an **intangible** thing, nouns are classed as being either **concrete** or **abstract**.

What is a concrete noun?

**Concrete nouns** name people, places, animals, or things that are or were physically tangible—that is, they can or could be seen or touched, or have some physical properties. For instance:

* **rocks**
* **lake**
* **countries**
* **people**
* **child**
* **air**
* **water**
* **bread**

**Proper nouns** are also usually concrete, as they describe unique people, places, or things.

* **Mary**
* **The Queen**
* **Africa**
* **my MacBook**
* **a Pepsi**

What is an abstract noun?

**Abstract nouns**, as their name implies, name intangible things, such as concepts, ideas, feelings, characteristics, attributes, etc.—you cannot see or touch these kinds of things.

Here are some examples of abstract nouns:

* **love**
* **hate**
* **decency**
* **conversation**
* **emotion**
* **aspiration**
* **excitement**
* **lethargy**

**Gerunds**, verbs that end in “-ing” and function as nouns, are also abstract. For example:

* **running**
* **swimming**
* **jumping**
* **reading**
* **writing**
* **loving**
* **breathing**

These all name actions as concepts. They cannot be seen or touched, so we know they are not concrete.

Countable Nouns vs.

Uncountable Nouns

Both concrete and abstract nouns can be either **countable** or **uncountable**, depending on what they name.

**Countable Nouns**

Countable nouns (also known as **count nouns**) are, as the name suggests, nouns that can be counted as individual units.

**Concrete countable nouns**

Many concrete nouns are countable. Consider the following, for example:

* **cup**
* **ambulance**
* **phone**
* **person**
* **dog**
* **computer**
* **doctor**

Each of these can be considered as an individual, separable item, which means that we are able to count them with numbers—we can have one, two, five, 15, 100, and so on. We can also use them with the indefinite **articles** *a* and *an* (which signify a single person or thing) or with the **plural form** of the noun. For example:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Singular** | **Plural** |
| a **cup** | two **cups** |
| an **ambulance** | several **ambulances** |
| a **phone** | 10 **phones** |
| a **person** | many **people** |

**Abstract countable nouns**

Even though abstract nouns are not tangible, many of them can still be counted as separable units. Like concrete nouns, they can take either *a* or *an* or be made plural. For example:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Singular** | **Plural** |
| a **conversation** | two **conversations** |
| an **emergency** | several **emergencies** |
| a **reading** | 10 **readings** |
| an **aspiration** | many **aspirations** |

[**Uncountable Nouns**](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Uncountable-Nouns.htm)

**Uncountable nouns**, on the other hand, are nouns that cannot be considered as separate units. They are also known as **non-count** or **mass nouns**.

**Concrete uncountable nouns**

Concrete nouns that are uncountable tend to be substances or collective categories of things. For instance:

* **Substances**: *wood, smoke, air, water*
* **Collective categories**: *furniture, homework, accommodation, luggage*

Uncountable nouns **cannot** take the indefinite articles *a* or *an* in a sentence, because these words indicate a single amount of something. Likewise, they cannot take numbers or plural forms, because there cannot be multiple units of them. For example:

* “I see (***some\****) **smoke** over there.” (correct)
* “I see ***a* smoke** over there.” (incorrect)
* “I don’t have (***any\****) **furniture**.” (correct)
* “I don’t have **furnitures**.” (incorrect)

(\*We often use the words *some* or *any* to indicate an unspecified quantity of uncountable nouns.)

However, uncountable nouns **can** sometimes take the definite article *the*, because it does not specify an amount:

* “They’re swimming in ***the* water**.”
* “***The* homework** this week is hard.”

**Abstract uncountable nouns**

A large number of abstract nouns are uncountable. These are usually ideas or attributes. For instance:

* **Ideas or concepts**: *love, hate, news\*, access, knowledge*
* **Attributes**: *beauty, intelligence, arrogance, permanence*

(\*Even though *news* ends in an “-s,” it is uncountable. We need this “-s” because without it, *news* would become *new*, which is an adjective.)

Again, these cannot take indefinite articles or be made plural.

* “He’s just looking for **love**.” (correct)
* “He’s just looking for ***a* love**.” (incorrect)
* “She’s gained a great deal of **knowledge** during college.” (correct)
* “She’s gained a great deal of **knowledges** during college.” (incorrect)

As with countable nouns, though, we can sometimes use the definite article *the*:

* “I can’t stand watching ***the* news**.”
* “Can you believe ***the* arrogance** he exhibits?”
* 1. Which of the following is a distinguishing feature of **abstract** nouns?
* a) They can be seen or touched
* b) They cannot be seen or touched
* c) They can be counted
* d) They cannot be counted
* 2. Proper nouns are generally \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
* a) concrete
* b) abstract
* 3. Is the following word **concrete** or **abstract**? *amazement*
* a) concrete
* b) abstract
* 4. Is the following word **concrete** or **abstract**? *sugar*
* a) concrete
* b) abstract
* 5. Is the following word **concrete** or **abstract**? *Australia*
* a) concrete
* b) abstract
* 6. True or False: All concrete nouns are countable.
* a) True
* b) False