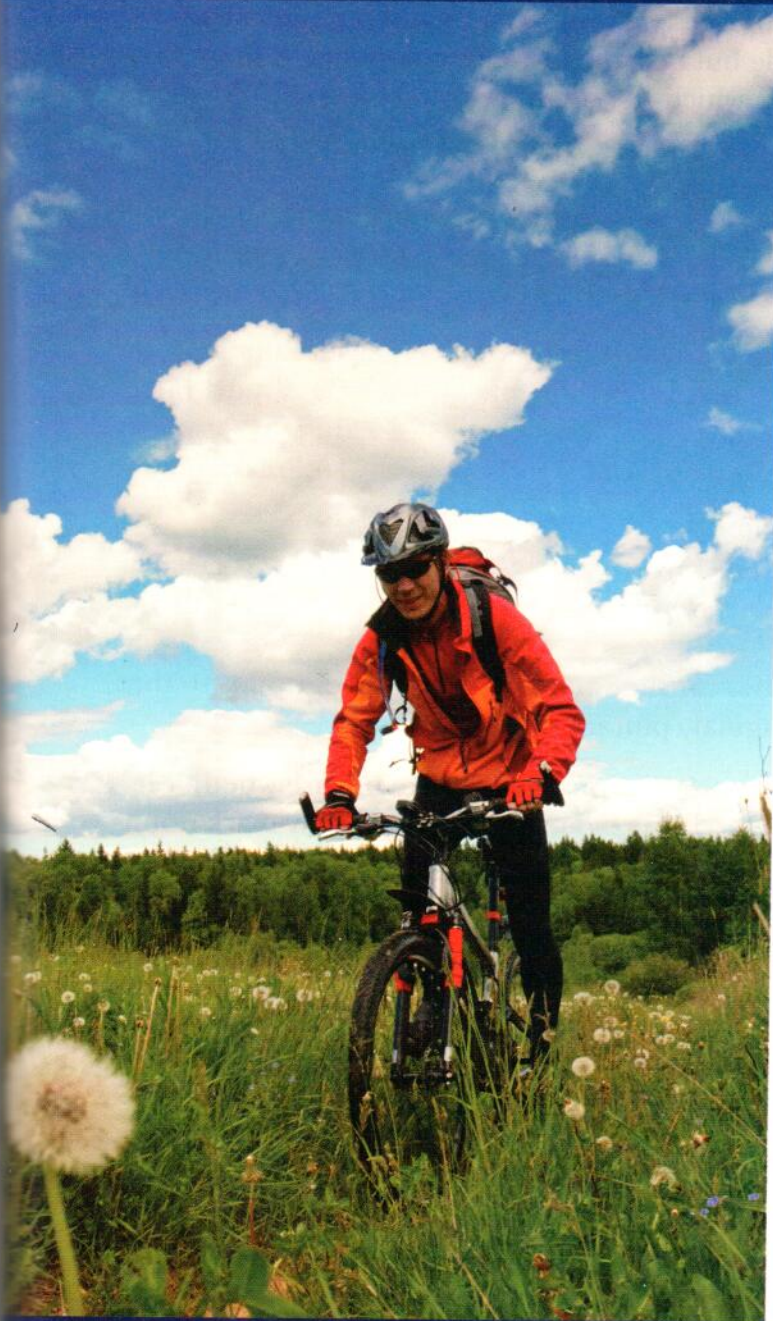


Unit 12

SINGULAR AND PLURAL OF NOUNS



Do you spend much time outdoors?
Why or why not? What are your favorite
outdoor places and activities near where
you live?

GOALS

- Learn why mastering the singular and plural of nouns is important
- Identify seven common problems writers encounter with the singular and plural of nouns
- Form and use the singular and plural of nouns correctly in exercises and writing

LEARN WHAT THE ERROR IS

Errors with Singular and Plural of Nouns

Nouns (names of persons, places, or things) in English can be made plural if they are countable but not if they are uncountable. A singular/plural noun error is one in which the singular form of a noun has been used instead of the plural or vice versa. For example, in the sentence *I have two sister*, there is a singular/plural noun error because *sister* should be *sisters*. Likewise, in the sentence *He gave me some informations*, there is a singular/plural noun error because *informations* should be *information*. The editing symbol for an error with the singular/plural of nouns is *s/pl*.

A singular/plural noun error is a local error and usually does not affect the meaning of a sentence, but frequent errors of this type can distract the reader's attention from the content of a piece of writing. In formal written English, readers expect to see correct use of the singular and plural of nouns.

Suggestions for Reducing Errors

- Become aware of the rules for the singular and plural of nouns so that you can reduce your singular/plural errors in writing.
- Look up a noun in a learner's dictionary if you are unsure whether it is countable or not. While writing, you may want to simply mark nouns that you need to check later for singular/plural forms. In that way, you can focus on content while you write and later go back and check singular/plural forms in the dictionary.
- Memorize the singular and plural forms of nouns that you use often in your classes or in your field of study.
- Train yourself to use the singular and plural of nouns correctly in English if your native language does not have a plural form. If your native language indicates singular and plural of nouns much as English does, focus on learning those nouns in English whose singular or plural is formed or used differently than in your own language.
- Listen closely to hear plurals in speaking. Because the plural *-s* is often difficult to hear in spoken English, plural nouns may sometimes sound singular to you.
- Pay careful attention to the singular and plural of nouns while you are reading.

Check Your Understanding

Write answers to the following questions. Share your answers with another student.

1. What is an error with the singular or plural of a noun?
2. What is a suggested strategy for checking the singular or plural of a noun while writing? Why would such a strategy be helpful?

GRAMMAR JOURNAL ENTRY 12 SINGULAR AND PLURAL OF NOUNS

Respond to the following in your grammar journal.

1. Write a list of five nouns you often use in your daily life, at school, or in your profession. Then, use each word in a sentence. Check your sentences with a native speaker, a tutor, or your instructor to see if you have formed the singular or the plural correctly.
2. If you are multilingual, write three sentences in your native language, using at least one plural noun in each. Then, write those same sentences in English and check the use of the plural in both your native language and English. Explain briefly how the use of the plural is similar or different.

UNDERSTAND COMMON PROBLEMS

This section presents seven problems that writers commonly encounter with the singular and plural of nouns. First, take the pre-test to see what you already know about the singular and plural of nouns. When you finish, check your answers on page 353. Then, carefully study each problem and the examples that illustrate it. Pay particular attention to those problems that correspond to the pre-test questions you had difficulty with. Remember that becoming aware of the types of errors you most often make with the singular and plural of nouns will increase your chances of avoiding these errors in your writing.

Pre-test

What Do You Already Know?

Test your ability to recognize errors with the singular and plural of nouns.

- A** Correct the marked errors with the singular and plural of nouns. These are examples of the seven common problems that are presented in this unit.

Problem 1 When I travel, I always take two ^{s/pl} suitcase.

Problem 2 My older sister is always willing to give me ^{s/pl} advices.

Problem 3 Perhaps you might like to read ^{s/pl} this two novels.

Problem 4 The little girl is selling red and ^{s/pl} yellows apples.

Problem 5 An old proverb says, "An eye for an eye and a ^{s/pl} tooths for a ^{s/pl} tooths."

Problem 6 On Valentine's Day, Andrea received one of the biggest ^{s/pl} box of chocolates I have ever seen.

Problem 7 When the meeting started, only two ^{s/pl} woman were in the audience.

B Underline and correct the one error in each of the following sentences. (The errors are not in any particular order.)

1. During the middle of the semester, we will start to review this chapter and this handouts.
2. Tonight I have to stay home and work on the difficults problem sets that I have not yet finished for my algebra class.
3. My professor said that he was unable to work with me this summer because he had to supervise five thesis.
4. During a laboratory class, students need to make sure that they handle the equipments carefully.
5. One of the most difficult adjustment that students need to make their first year in college is how to manage their study time.
6. In order to finish the lab, we have to work out the calculations steps by steps.
7. Before going into an exam, students should make sure that they have the materials they will need, such as a calculator and some writing instrument.

Seven Common Problems

Incorrect: The ^{s/pl} student in the class were asking ^{s/pl} question.

Correct: The students in the class were asking questions.

Incorrect: I solved all but two ^{s/pl} problem on my calculus test.

Correct: I solved all but two problems on my calculus test.

Problem 1

A countable noun is singular when it should be plural.

Problem 2

An uncountable noun has been made plural.

Incorrect: You should seek ^{s/pl} advices when you are making an important decision.

Correct: You should seek advice when you are making an important decision.

Incorrect: Water consists of two parts ^{s/pl} hydrogens and one part ^{s/pl} oxygens.

Correct: Water consists of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Look at the noun and ask yourself whether it is countable or uncountable. If it is uncountable, do not add -s or -es. If you are unsure, check the noun in a learner's dictionary. Regular dictionaries do not contain this information.

Problem 3

A noun and its demonstrative adjective do not agree.

Incorrect: ^{s/pl} These book are for the other class, not yours.

Correct: These books are for the other class, not yours.

Correct: This book is for the other class, not yours.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Remember that, unlike adjectives, demonstrative adjectives agree in number with the noun they modify. If you are unsure, refer to the demonstrative adjectives in the Review Grammar Solutions section of this unit.

Problem 4

A noun or an adjective modifying a noun has been made plural.

Incorrect: The campus is made up of ^{s/pl} reds bricks buildings.

Correct: The campus is made up of red brick buildings.

Incorrect: Next week we have to write a ^{s/pl} five-hundreds-word essay.

Correct: Next week we have to write a five-hundred-word essay.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: If your native language makes adjectives plural to agree with the noun, be especially careful to avoid this error in English.

Problem 5

An idiomatic expression has incorrectly been made singular or plural.

Incorrect: To make a good decision, you need to weigh the ^{s/pl} pro and con.

Correct: To make a good decision, you need to weigh the pros and cons.

Incorrect: Robert promised to keep ^{s/pl} eyes out for the blue shirt I want.

Correct: Robert promised to keep an eye out for the blue shirt I want.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Idiomatic expressions often have to be memorized. If you are unsure, look up the expression in a learner's dictionary.

Problem 6

After an *of*-phrase that shows quantity, a countable noun has not been made plural or an uncountable noun has been made plural.

Incorrect: One of the oldest ^{s/pl} building on campus is North Hall.

Correct: One of the oldest buildings on campus is North Hall.

Incorrect: Some of the ^{s/pl} milks has gone sour.

Correct: Some of the milk has gone sour. (milk is not countable)

Correct: Some of the quarts of milk have gone sour.

Note: Some of the quantity phrases are *one of the*, *most of the*, *any of the*, *half of the*, or *some of the*.

Incorrect: Five ^{s/pl} womans signed up for the class in auto mechanics.

Correct: Five women signed up for the class in auto mechanics.

SELF-HELP STRATEGY: Be aware that some nouns in English have an irregular plural. Common examples are *tooth-teeth*; *fish-fish*; *thesis-theses*. If you are unsure, look up the noun in a dictionary. The dictionary entry will show irregular plural forms.

Problem 7

A countable noun that has an irregular plural has been incorrectly formed.

REVIEW GRAMMAR SOLUTIONS

Rules for Forming the Singular and Plural of Nouns

1. **Nouns are either countable or uncountable (also called *mass* or *noncountable* nouns).**

Examples of countable nouns:

table, building, road, carrot, horse

Examples of uncountable nouns:

luggage, research, advice, potassium, swimming

Note: Gerunds (*-ing* forms as nouns) are uncountable and do not take an *-s* ending.

2. **Countable nouns have singular and plural forms (*book, books*).** Individual members of a group can be counted (*one book, two books, three books*). Countable nouns (*textbook, test, or assignment*) can be made plural by adding *-s* or *-es*.
3. **Uncountable nouns have only one form (*equipment, air, happiness, vocabulary, homework*) and cannot be counted.** We cannot say *one equipment, one air, or one happiness*. Note that uncountable nouns take a singular verb (*The air is fresh*).
4. **Some nouns can be either countable or uncountable depending on their meaning.**

Examples:

Learning English is hard work.

The complete works of Dickens will be published in a new edition soon. (meaning all the different types of literature he wrote)

Many painters like southern France because of its intense light.

From that hill, the lights of the town are beautiful at night.
(meaning all the different types of lights)

5. **Some nouns have irregular plural forms.** The plural form of some nouns is the same as the singular.

Examples:

child, children; life, lives; goose, geese

deer, deer; sheep, sheep; fish, fish

6. **Adjectives can never be made plural in English.** Nouns used as adjectives are also singular.

Examples:

a long day, five long days

one chocolate bar, two chocolate bars

7. Demonstrative adjectives agree in number with the noun they modify.

The demonstrative adjectives are *this*, *that* = singular; *these*, *those* = plural.

Examples:

this room, these rooms

that castle, those castles

8. A countable noun after an *of*-phrase that shows quantity is always plural. An uncountable noun after these phrases is always singular.

Examples:

Many of the workers at that company would like higher pay.

Two-thirds of the water in that pond will be dried up by summer.

IMPROVE YOUR WRITING STYLE

USING WEEK(S), YEAR(S), AND MONTH(S)

When week, year, or month is used as an adjective, it does not take an -s ending.

Examples:

Our school is on a ten-week quarter system.

When I was a four-year-old child, I was still living in Taiwan.

That problem is so simple that a two-year-old could figure it out.
(Here, *old* is a noun denoting a person or thing of a certain age.)

My aunt will be taking a three-month vacation in Europe.

When week, year, or month is used as a noun, it takes an -s ending.

Examples:

Ferdinand traveled in Africa for four weeks.

Ten months ago, my uncle immigrated to the United States.

You must be at least sixty years old to take advantage of the senior discount. (*Years* is a noun and *sixty* and *old* are adjectives.)

1. These frequently used nouns are uncountable. They do not take an -s ending.

advice	honesty	progress
air	ignorance	sadness
clothing	information	scenery
enjoyment	intelligence	snow
equipment	luggage	traffic
evidence	machinery	violence
fun	patience	vocabulary
furniture	peace	wealth
homework	poverty	

Examples:

Incorrect: Most students feel they need to improve their academic vocabularies.

Correct: Most students feel they need to improve their academic vocabulary.

Incorrect: When doing a chemistry lab assignment, students use many different kinds of equipments.

Correct: When doing a chemistry lab assignment, students use many different kinds of equipment.

2. These frequently used nouns are both countable and uncountable depending on meaning.

cereal	oil	tea
chicken	paper	temperature
density	rain	velocity
glass	rice	voltage
hair	salt	water
light	sand	work

Examples:

Most people like dishes made with chicken. (the type of meat)

My sister's fifth-grade class is raising chickens and will sell their eggs. (the animal)

My grandmother wears glasses for reading. (device that improves vision)

The fake diamond was made of glass. (the material)

Ken eats cereal for breakfast.

Different cereals are popular for breakfast. (meaning types or kinds of)

PRACTICE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

EXERCISE 1

Directions: Underline and correct errors with the singular or plural. Some sentences may have more than one error.

Example: Please don't forget to buy some *bananas* banana on your way home.

1. When I read, I mark unfamiliar vocabularies, which I later look up in a dictionary.
2. This boys needs to sign up for the camping trip.
3. One of the best way to practice your English is to join a conversation club.
4. Many cultures teach respect for the elderlies.
5. I had three piece of candies and some cake at the party.
6. My writing needs improvements, so I am going to work with a tutor.
7. My friends are renting a hundreds-year-old house.
8. The professor is hiring students to analyze the datas she collected.
9. You need to follow the instructions steps by steps to make your experiment come out as planned.
10. I had almost given up on finding my watch when it caught my eyes from under a pillow.
11. My aunt has five childs: two sons and three daughter.
12. My roommate has excellent computers skills.

EXERCISE 2

Directions: In the following student paragraph, selected nouns and adjectives are underlined. Decide whether you need to make the noun plural or leave the noun or adjective singular. Make any necessary corrections. The first one has been done for you.

assignments

During the fall quarter, I was overwhelmed with many assignment. The most unexpected one was writing. Even though I knew that my two education class required writing, the professors I had were especially fond of essay writing. Both of my education class required a total of eight paper, each of which were four to six page long; in addition, the final papers in both classes were 20-page research papers. Furthermore, both of my biochemistry class required a total of eight lab write-ups and three essays. In sum, I had to write more than 20 papers last quarter, and that papers were a nightmare for me. Previously, I thought that only English classes would require a lot of writing, which is not one of my favorite activity. In fact, last semester was the only time during my four years in college that I had to write so much. Thus, I lost much of my fear of writing. While I have learned that revision is time-consuming work, it has helped me improve my writing and my grades.

EXERCISE 3

Directions: Correct any singular or plural errors by underlining the incorrect noun or adjective and writing the correct form above it. Use a learner's dictionary if needed. There are 15 errors. The first one has been done for you.

States

Online shopping has become very popular in the United State, and sales have been growing annually, sometimes at twice the rates of retail store sale. With so many website these day, online shopping has indeed become fast and convenient. For examples, you can avoid the tedious works of filling out a mail order form by hands, a great frustrations with a paper catalog. With online shopping, the website quickly does all the calculations, such as taxes and shipping. Without even setting feet in a store, you can buy a simple white blouse, a bouquet of flower, or a whole set of patio furnitures. However, you do not always save time with online shopping. If your order meets your satisfactions, you certainly have saved time. If not, it is time-consuming to repack your purchase and send it back to the company. To avoid this problem, you can find what you want in the store's online catalog. Then, you can go to the company's nearest store to make sure it is what you want. With this approach, you have the best of both world—online and in-store shopping.

EXERCISE 4

Directions: Read a short news article. Then, underline ten nouns in the article and decide why each noun is singular or plural. If you are unsure why a noun is singular, check a learner's dictionary to determine whether it is an uncountable noun and, therefore, it cannot be made plural. Remember that set phrases are an exception to this rule.

Post-test**What Do You Know Now?**

- A** Write the plural for the following words. If there is no plural form of the noun, write an X.

information _____ advice _____

assignment _____ violence _____

vocabulary _____ problem _____

this _____ university _____

child _____ woman _____

- B** Correct the underlined singular and plural errors in the following student paragraph.

It is a commonly known fact that dairy product, such as milks, yogurt, and cheese are rich sources of calciums, but how many people know that these foods products are also loaded with protein? It is for these reason that dietitian recommend that people consume two to four serving of this food group each day. A glass of milk or a cup of yogurts has high-quality protein that is equivalent to an ounce of meats or cheese or one egg. These food item are certainly good for our healths. Whenever possible, however, we should opt for low-fat dairy products.

C Find and correct the one error in each of the following sentences. Then, explain what the error is.

1. Our school accepted 800 transfers students for next year.

2. In the mountains, deers come to eat in people's yards.

3. Three of the student finished the exam early.

4. Jane washed all of her clothings after the camping trip.

5. The weakened hurricane brought six inch of rain to Florida.

6. Would you like to borrow this books to read on your vacation?

7. I have visited that museum many time.

D Write sentences to show the difference in meaning between a noun that is both countable and uncountable.

1. Write a sentence with the noun "paper" as an uncountable noun.

2. Write a sentence with the noun "papers" as a countable noun.

3. Write a sentence with the noun "work" as an uncountable noun.

4. Write a sentence with the noun "works" as a countable noun.

APPLY WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED TO WRITING

Select a writing topic and follow the steps in Appendix A on page 337.

Topic 1:

Look at the rose in the photo and consider how you might describe it to someone. Then, find an interesting item located outdoors to describe. It could be a leaf, a plant, a rock, a flower, a window, or any other item. In your description, include color, shape, size, and any unique markings. Conclude by saying why you are interested in this item or what you particularly like about it.



Topic 2:

To what extent is your current life or job stressful? Discuss your favorite ways to relieve stress and explain how they are beneficial to you.



Topic 3:

We often hear about changes that are destroying the earth, such as habitat destruction, invasive species, over-population, over-harvesting of resources, and global warming. Which situation do you think is the most important for people in your area or country to address now? Why? What is being done (or should be done) to lessen the negative impact on the environment?

