Section 14  nouns

page 201

The illustrations simply provide a few examples of the ‘noun + noun’ structure. No activity is necessary.

page 202

language notes

Most of this lesson is unnecessary for speakers of Western European languages, which distinguish countable and uncountable nouns grammatically in much the same way as English. However, note that some uncountable English words have countable equivalents in some other languages, so students may use them with *a/an* or make them plural:

*Can you give me an advice?*
*I need some more informations.*

The last part of the lesson focuses on this point.

Speakers of other languages may have continuing difficulty with the English countable-uncountable distinction:

*We must put a petrol in the car.*
*I haven’t got much friend.*

This is because, in many languages, there is no grammatical difference between the two kinds of noun. It may not be enough to explain that the English distinction depends on whether things ‘can be counted’ or not. In students’ languages, counting may work in the same way for both kinds of noun, with the equivalent of ‘one piece of metal’, ‘two pieces of metal’, ‘one piece of car’, ‘two pieces of car’, for example (only more complicated than that!). It’s probably better to talk about whether things naturally come as separate items or not.

Learners have particular difficulty in cases where the difference seems rather arbitrary (compare *oats/wheat, advertisement/publicity, attack/aggression, job/work*). And words for consumables often have both countable and uncountable uses (see Exercise 2), as do many abstract nouns.

possible further activities

**What kind of noun?: extending Exercise 1:** Say a series of well-known nouns; students repeat them, putting *a* or *an* before the singular countables and *some* before the others.

Like this:

‘table’ – ‘a table’
‘butter’ – ‘some butter’
‘chairs’ – ‘some chairs’
‘coat’ – ‘a coat’
‘make-up’ – ‘some make-up’
‘problems’ – ‘some problems’
‘exam’ – ‘an exam’

Keep it going quickly, but not so fast that the students get confused.

**Vocabulary expansion: extending Exercise 1** Teach some more words in each group. Students have to decide whether to put *a/an* or nothing with them.
More vocabulary expansion: materials  Revise and teach some names of materials (e.g. steel, rubber, paper, cardboard, silver, gold, aluminium, brass). Get students to write sentences saying what things are made of them, using the uncountable and countable nouns correctly. (‘Books are made of paper.’ ‘Windows are made of glass.’) Can they say what everything in the classroom is made of? (Note the difference between made of and made from in cases like This table is made of wood / Paper is made from wood.)

Advertisements and song titles  Ask students to find (in magazines or on the internet) five or more advertisements or song titles with countable nouns, and five or more with uncountable nouns.

page 203

possible further activities

Vocabulary expansion: containers  Give the names of some things or substances; discuss the possible words for containers, teaching new ones where necessary. Then get students to write appropriate expressions. (‘a packet of butter’ ‘a can/tin of peas’ ‘a barrel of oil’ ‘a bucket of water’) The differences between words like tin, box and packet can be tricky. There is a very useful illustration in the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (8th edition, page V29).

Price survey  Give students a list of ten or so ‘shopping’ items (e.g. a kilo of onions, a large packet of washing powder, a litre of milk, a loaf of bread, a 500 gm packet of rice, a bunch of roses, a litre of petrol, a 500 gm jar of instant coffee, a cheap pair of trainers). Get them, perhaps in groups, to estimate how much the items cost and arrange them in order, from most to least expensive. Afterwards they check up (in shops or on the internet) and see who was closest to the truth. (In a mixed class, it would be amusing to do this as a competition between girls and boys, or men and women.)

page 204

language notes

Dropping plural -(e)s is quite a common mistake.

*I have two younger brother.  *I needed both hand to lift it.

This can happen for several reasons. The student’s mother tongue may not have distinct plural forms. Final -s may be difficult to pronounce after a consonant, or in all cases, for students whose languages have different phonetic structures from English (e.g. Spanish, Chinese or Thai speakers); sounds which are not pronounced are also easily dropped in writing.

The pronunciation of plural -(e)s depends on what comes before it:

– /s/ after an unvoiced sound like /p/, /k/ or /t/
– /z/ after a vowel or a voiced consonant like /b/, /g/, /d/, /m/, /l/ etc
– /ɪz/ after /s/, /z/, /ʃ/ and /tʃ/.

The distinction between /s/ and /z/ is unimportant except for learners who want a very high level of accuracy in pronunciation, but students should be clear about when to pronounce the ending /ɪz/.

Note that some English plurals may have singular equivalents in students’ languages:

*I need to buy a new jean.
*Have you got a scissor(s)?

➔ Section 14 continues
possible further activities

*Pronunciation* If you want to make an issue of the pronunciation of plural (-e)s, say the words in Exercise 2 and ask students to say the plurals.

*Plural formation* When you have worked through the lesson, ask students to close their books and write five plurals ending in -ies, five other regular plurals ending in -es, and five other regular plurals ending in -s.

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**Page 205**

possible further activities

*Consolidation* Give students time to learn the various plurals. Then get them to test each other.

*Internet* Get students to check on the internet to see whether the words in group 6 are sometimes used as plurals. They will find that all of them are, but that they are much more often treated as singular.

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**Page 206**

language notes

The point about group nouns having plural verbs (e.g. *The team are playing badly.*) is mostly relevant to British English; this happens much less often in American English.

possible further activities

*Groups in the class* Get students to complete some or all of the following sentences.

Tell them not to use *can* (because this doesn’t have different singular and plural forms).

- The majority of people in the class …
- A minority of people in the class …
- A large number of people in the class …
- A small number of people in the class …
- A couple of people in the class …

*Internet: group nouns* Invite students to check on the internet to see whether they can find examples of *the team, my family* and *the audience* followed by *are* or *have.*

*Internet: quantifying expressions* Can students find any examples of “the majority of us is” or “a number of people is” on the internet? How common are these compared with the “the majority of us are” and “a number of people are”? (Note that a singular verb is often there because of an earlier noun, not because of *majority* or *number.*

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**Page 207**

language notes

The correct spelling of possessive nouns (*father’s, parents’, children’s*) is difficult for many native speakers, and mistakes are common. On a menu recently we saw the following words (beautifully systematic, but wrong!)

- coffee’s
- tea’s
- cake’s

On the same menu we found:

- drinks
- sandwiches
- fillings
- supplements

Can you see what their system was?

Pronunciation: the possessive -s ending is pronounced in the same way as the plural endings (see notes for page 204). ‘Pronunciation for grammar’ will help with this if necessary.

➔ Section 14 continues
possible further activities

Visual punctuation  Say some nouns (mixed singular, plural and irregular plural). Keep to nouns for people. Students add the possessive endings by drawing them in the air, like this:

- sister – students draw apostrophe s
- doctors – students draw apostrophe
- children – students draw apostrophe s

Twenty questions: whose?  Think of something that belongs to somebody in the class. The students have to discover what it is, asking no more than 20 questions; you can only answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’. It helps if you suggest some useful questions in advance, explaining vocabulary where necessary. For example:

- Is it in this room?
- Is it a part of the body?
- Is it manufactured?
- Is it useful?
- Is it bigger than a …?

When they think they’ve got it, they ask for example ‘Is it Anna’s bike?’ or ‘Is it Mario’s nose?’

Once you’ve demonstrated, it can be done in groups.

Chains of possessives  Get students to make chains with several possessives (e.g. ‘John’s father’s secretary’s boyfriend’s mother’). Who can make the longest? (The possessives should all be different nouns for people.)

day 208

language notes

The differences between the three common ways of putting nouns together, practised on pages 208–210, are complex – this is one of the most messy areas of English grammar. (Compare dog’s leg, table leg, leg of lamb.) Typical mistakes:

- *the John’s house  * the ears of my wife  *my house’s front

At this level we simply teach the central uses of the three structures.

possible further activities

Time  Ask students to write estimates of the time necessary for journeys and/or pieces of work (putting apostrophes in the right place). Like this:

- ‘writing an email’ – ‘three minutes’ work’
- ‘writing a book’ – ‘a year’s work’
- ‘building a house’ – ‘six months’ work’
- ‘going from Rome to Bologna’ – ‘four hours’ drive’
- ‘going from London to Sydney’ – ‘twenty hours’ flight’

page 209

language notes

Students may still have occasional trouble forming and using expressions like race horse and horse race, or getting the words in the right order, if their language puts nouns before modifying expressions:

- *We have a meeting of business tomorrow.
- *I don’t like soup fish.

They may also make the first noun plural, which is unusual in English:

- *shoes shop

⇒ Section 14 continues
possible further activities

Vocabulary expansion: finding examples  Ask students how many noun + noun combinations they can find in the classroom, or think of in a typical house or town. (‘computer table’, ‘wall poster’, ‘light switch’, ‘kitchen door’, ‘soup spoon’, ‘clothes shop’, …). Ask them to find ten or more in advertisements for food or drink.

page 210

possible further activities

Headlines  Ask students to find news headlines (in newspapers or on the internet) which have strings of three or more nouns.

page 211

language notes

The grammar of the substitute word one is quite complicated, and students can easily get confused:

*I would like a one with a big garden.
They may also drop the article after with in this structure (see page 163):
*… one with big garden.

possible further activities

Acting: a … one  Put students in groups. Tell them that they are in a room. Give each group a card with an adjective. In turn, the groups have to show what kind of room they are in by mime or acting, without using the word on the card. The others say what kind of room it is, using one (‘a cold one’, ‘a big one’ …) Possible adjectives:
cold, hot, big, small, dirty, beautiful, dark, noisy
You can do the same kind of activity with other nouns (e.g. car, dog, child, …). Not every group has to have the same noun.