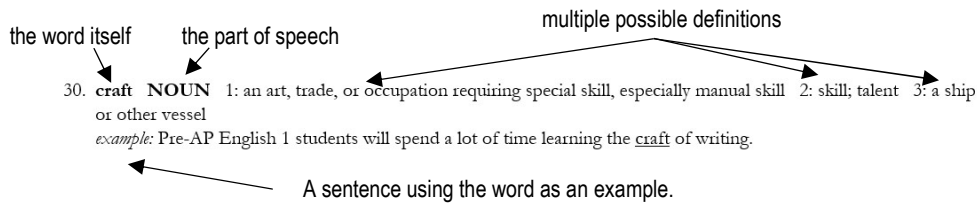# Grammar Lesson 1: Nouns and Articles

1.1 Parts of a Dictionary Definition

When looking up words in either this book or a dictionary, you will notice that the definitions follow a pattern:

the word itself   the part of speech   multiple possible definitions

30. **craft** **NOUN**   1: an art, trade, or occupation requiring special skill, especially manual skill   2: skill; talent   3: a ship or other vessel
example: Pre-AP English 1 students will spend a lot of time learning the <u>craft</u> of writing.

A sentence using the word as an example.

Sometimes, you will also see **etymological** notes. **Etymology** is the study of the origins of words; most of our words in the English language come from other languages, such as Latin or Anglo-Saxon. Understanding a word's roots can help you to understand its meaning and its relationships to other words.

1.2 Parts of Speech

In the English language, we have eight different parts of speech. The parts of speech are a set of categories of words based on those words' functions. The parts of speech are the most basic unit in grammar; think of them as the atoms of language.

Some words in English can work as multiple different parts of speech depending on their use. For example, in the following sentence:

> To excel in the <u>craft</u> of writing, students should possess a thorough understanding of grammar.

the word "craft" is a *thing* and is therefore used as a noun. But in this sentence:

> Students <u>craft</u> clear, specific sentences using their knowledge of the parts of speech.

the word "craft" is the *action* of the sentence and is thus a verb. With some minor alterations, you can also change many words into even more parts of speech; "crafty" becomes and adjective, while "craftily" is an adverb.

1.3 Nouns: Definition

As you certainly learned in elementary school, nouns can be people, places, things, or ideas.

Look at the nouns from this vocabulary list and place them in the correct category of noun based on their meanings (you might need to look at their definitions to be able to do this):

craft	cunning	dignity	exploit	fort	hearth	indignation
insolence	obscenity	shroud	spite	threshold	yoke	plunder

People	Places	Things	Ideas

1.4 Categories of Nouns

We can break nouns down into several different categories depending on their attributes.

1.4.1   Common Nouns vs. Proper Nouns

Common nouns refer to general, non-specific people, places, things, or ideas; proper nouns are the names of particular people, places, things, or ideas. Proper nouns are usually capitalized, while common nouns are usually not (with the major exception of when they begin a sentence).

Circle all of the common nouns in the paragraph below; draw a box around the proper nouns.

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"You ever notice how they never teach us about *improper* nouns? I mean, what are they hiding?!"

The Odyssey is an epic poem about Odysseus, a warrior making his way back from the Trojan War to his

homeland, Ithaca. Although scholars believe that the myth was the collective work of many poets who each

developed different portions of the story, it was written down by Homer, the most famous storyteller in Ancient

Greece.

1.4.2   Concrete vs. Abstract Nouns

Concrete nouns are part of the physical world; you can perceive them with your senses. **Abstract nouns**, on the other hand, are not tangible and exist on the level of ideas or concepts. Consider the following sets of words:

Concrete	Abstract
ship	navigation
injury	violence
monster	danger
island	solitude
goddess	immortality

Place the nouns from our vocabulary list in the appropriate column (there might be some disagreement!):

craft	cunning	dignity	exploit	fort	hearth	indignation
insolence	obscenity	shroud	spite	threshold	yoke	plunder

Concrete	Abstract

1.4.3 Count Nouns vs. Non-Count Nouns

Some nouns represent countable units (for example, minutes); these are called **count nouns**. On the other hand, some nouns do not represent a specific quantity and cannot be counted (such as time); these, as you might imagine, are called either **non-count** or **uncountable nouns.**

Count nouns are often concrete nouns; non-count nouns are often abstract nouns. Go back up to the previous section and see if this appears to be true. Are the nouns in the "concrete" column things that could be counted?

Count nouns can be turned into plurals; non-count nouns cannot.

1.4.3.1 Plurals

We often make a noun plural by adding the letter "s" to the end of it. However, there are some spelling exceptions.

kind of word	change	example	plural form
most words	add "s"	shroud	shrouds
ending in "y"	drop the "y" and add "ies"	obscenity	obscenities
ending in "s" or "es"	add "es"	enchantress (from JLC List 3)	enchantresses
ending in "x"	add "es"	crucifix (from Dracula List 1)	crucifixes
ending in "um"	drop the "um" and add "a"	stratum (from CMC List 1)	strata

Change the nouns in the chart below to make them plural:

singular	plural	singular	plural
adversary		hearth	
alias		mutiny	
ally		pendulum	
asylum		sanatorium	
canopy		status	
casualty		strategy	
craft		tax	
crucifix		threshold	
dynasty		ultimatum	
felony		yoke	

Singulars

Spaghetto   Broccolo   Jacuzzo

7
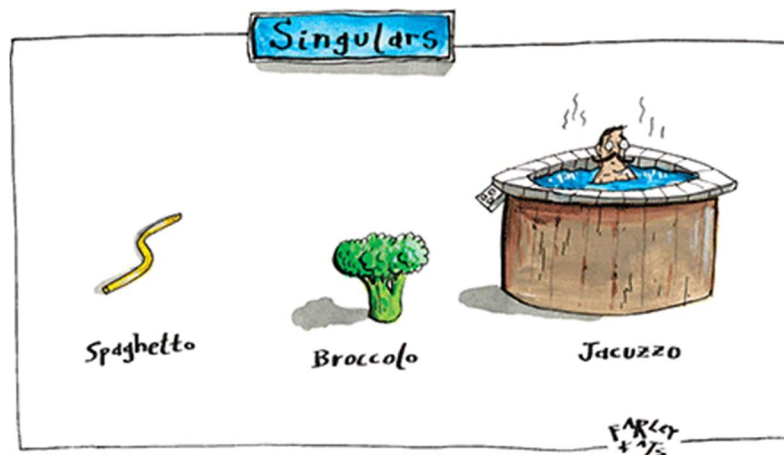
1.4.3.2 "Fewer" vs. "Less" and "Many" vs. "Much"

One of the reasons why you need to be able to tell this difference between count and non-count nouns is to use certain quantity adjectives correctly. Think about *why* the underlined words in the following sentences sound wrong:

There are <u>much</u> students in this class!

I have so <u>many</u> homework to finish by tomorrow.

The rule is that you use "fewer" and "many" for count nouns, while you use "less" and "much" for non-count nouns. Circle the correct word to complete each sentence by determining whether the noun it modifies is a count or a non-count noun:

1. Odysseus, tell us of your (many, much) exploits on your journey!
2. The Cyclops possesses (fewer, less) cunning than Odysseus.
3. The men had (fewer, less) crafts after the Laestrygonians attacked their ships.
4. Penelope is known throughout Greece as a woman with (many, much) dignity.


"What can I say? I was an English major."

1.4.4 Collective Nouns

Collective nouns are nouns whose meaning implies a collection of more than one thing. For example, a "group" is necessarily composed of *multiple* people, objects, etc. Consider the following examples:

1. The <u>class</u> is reading Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*.
2. The Greek <u>army</u> crushed their Trojan enemies.
3. Odysseus's <u>family</u> waits for him to come home.

Groups of animals often have unique terms that are collective nouns; for example, a flock of birds, a swarm or bees, a school of fish, a herd of buffalo, a pod of whales, a murder of crows, a charm of foxes, a conspiracy of lemurs, and so on.
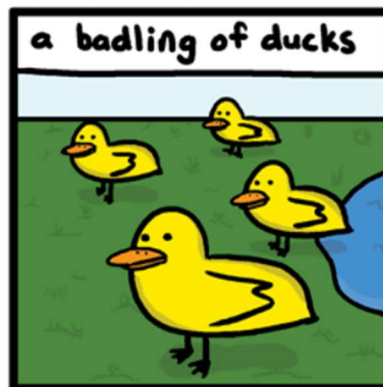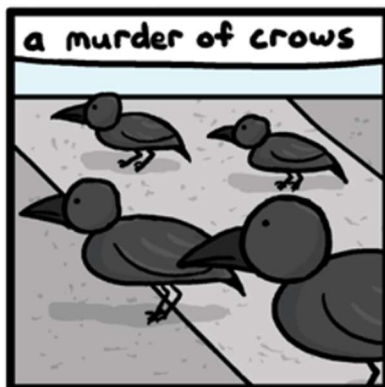
Understanding how collective nouns work will be important in our next lesson on verbs.

1.5 Gendered Nouns

In about 25% of all of the world's languages, nouns have a gender associated with them (even when they have nothing to do with being male or female!). For example, in Spanish, "table" is *la mesa*, which is feminine, while "fork" is *el tenedor*, which is masculine.

In English, most of our nouns do *not* have any gender attached to their meaning. There are some exceptions; the word "woman" is necessarily feminine, while the meaning of "bachelor" is inherently masculine.

Skilled and sensitive writers will be thoughtful about how any implied gender in the words that they choose might create bias.

Consider alternatives to words that suggest that only one gender performs a particular role or occupation.

- For example, saying "firemen risk their lives to save citizens and deserve a raise" suggests that the only people doing that job are male and ignores the women who are also making a significant sacrifice. A more accurate term would be "firefighters."
- The word "freshman" comes from a time when only young men were allowed to enroll at universities. A better word would be "ninth graders" or "first-year students."

Use words that have gender- and age-related meaning equally.

- Most people wouldn't call a 30-year-old male person a "boy." It is fairly common, however, to hear 30-year-old female people called "girls."

Choose collective nouns that are gender neutral.

- If you are talking about the entire population of the earth, the word "mankind" leaves out 50% of it. Use "humanity" or "the human race" instead.

1.6 Articles

Articles are technically a kind of adjectives, but they are so frequently used with nouns that it makes sense for us to mention them here. Articles are paired with nouns to indicate a general or a specific instance of that noun:

"the"	definite article	used to indicate a specific noun
"a/an"	indefinite article	used to indicate a general noun

1.7 Noun Phrases

We will talk about a lot more about phrases throughout our study of grammar this year, but for now, you need to know that a phrase is a group of words (that is, at least two). A noun phrase is made up of a noun plus any other words that add to its meaning (articles, adjectives, etc.). For example, in this sentence:

The brave hero battled the monster.

… "hero" is a noun, but "the brave hero" is a noun phrase.