“Count” and “non-count” refer to different kinds of nouns. Count nouns stand for things of which there can be more than one: beings which can be conceived as individuals, or objects with a definite shape or individual identity. Non-count nouns stand for things or ideas which are thought of in the mass or as a single entity. Count nouns have a plural form, while non-count nouns do not. Some nouns are count nouns in one sense and non-count nouns in another (“Let them eat cake” means cake in general; “I baked a cake” means on specific cake.)

Here is a summary of the differences in usage between count and non-count nouns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count Nouns</th>
<th>Non-Count Nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>have singular and plural forms</td>
<td>have only singular form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take singular or plural verbs, depending on their form</td>
<td>take only singular verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can have <em>a</em>, <em>an</em> or <em>one</em> before them in the singular</td>
<td>cannot have <em>a</em>, <em>an</em> or <em>one</em> before them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can have <em>many</em> or <em>few</em> before them in the plural</td>
<td>can have <em>much</em> or <em>little</em> before them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can have <em>some</em> (meaning <em>several</em>) before them only in the plural</td>
<td>can have <em>some</em> (meaning <em>a quantity of</em>) before them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can have a <em>number of</em> before them in the plural (but not <em>amount of</em>)</td>
<td>can have <em>amount of</em> before them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here are some groups of count and non-count nouns:

**Count Nouns**
• Names of living beings and their parts:
  a man        a child        a horse        a toad        an ant
  a lily       a carrot       a face         an eye        a leg

• Objects with a definite shape or definite boundary:
  a desk       a car          a book         a house       a city

• Units of measurement or groups by which beings or things are subdivided:
  a piece      a drop         a gram         a cupful      a litre
  a flock [of geese]    a herd [of elephants]  a lot
  a family      a class       a nation

• Abstract nouns of which there can be more than one:
  an idea       a subject      a problem      a reward

Non-Count Nouns
• Names of substances or materials, including food thought of in the mass:
  water        air            smoke         gold          cotton       wood
  coffee       flour          butter        salt          earth        dust

• Abstract nouns thought of as general concepts or qualities:
  truth         strength       health        pride         care          heaviness
  education     patriotism

• Names for groups of similar items making up “wholes,” often called “collective nouns”:
  luggage       furniture      traffic        equipment     money

• Languages:
  English       French         Chinese

• Fields of study:
  philosophy    history        literature    chemistry    poetry
  mathematics   physics [these last examples are plural in form but singular in usage]

• Sports, games, activities:
  soccer        basketball     chess          hockey

• Nouns ending in ing [gerunds]”
  reading        sailing        thinking

**Note:** The *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (available in the Library or the Writing Centre) labels nouns as “countable” or “uncountable”.

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