

Nouns

Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens
Bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens
Brown paper packages tied up with strings
These are a few of my favorite nouns

Cream colored ponies and crisp apple streudels
Doorbells and sleigh bells and schnitzel with noodles
Wild geese that fly with the moon on their wings
These are a few of my favorite nouns

Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes
Snowflakes that stay on my nose and eyelashes
Silver white winters that melt into springs
These are a few of my favorite nouns

When the dog bites
When the bee stings
When I'm feeling sad
I simply remember my favorite nouns
And then I don't feel so bad.

Apologies to Oscar Hammerstein II,
lyricist of "My Favorite Things"
from *The Sound of Music*

Definition

A **noun** is the name of a person, place, thing, or idea. Whatever exists, we assume, can be named, and that name is a noun. A **proper noun**, which names a specific person, place, or thing (Carlos, Queen Marguerite, Middle East, Jerusalem, Malaysia, Presbyterianism, God, Spanish, Buddhism, the Republican Party), is almost always capitalized. A proper noun used as an addressed person's name is called a **noun of address**. **Common nouns** name everything else, things that usually are not capitalized.

A group of related words can act as a single noun-like entity within a sentence. A **Noun Clause** contains a subject and verb and can do anything that a noun can do:

What he does for this town is a blessing.

A **Noun Phrase**, frequently a noun accompanied by modifiers, is a group of related words acting as a noun: the oil depletion allowance; the abnormal, hideously enlarged nose.

There is a separate section on word combinations that become **Compound Nouns** — such as daughter-in-law, half-moon, and stick-in-the-mud.

Categories of Nouns

Nouns can be classified further as **count nouns**, which name anything that can be counted

Some texts will include the category of **abstract nouns**, by which we mean the kind of word that is not tangible, such as *warmth*, *justice*, *grief*, and *peace*. Abstract nouns are sometimes troublesome for non-native writers because they can appear with determiners or without: "Peace settled over the countryside." "The skirmish disrupted the peace that had settled over the countryside." See the section on **Plurals** for additional help with **collective nouns**, words that can be singular or plural, depending on context.

Forms of Nouns

Nouns can be in the subjective, possessive, and objective case. The word *case* defines the role of the noun in the sentence. Is it a subject, an object, or does it show possession?

The English professor [subject] is tall.

He chose the English professor [object].

The English professor's [possessive] car is green.

Nouns in the subject and object role are identical in form; nouns that show the possessive, however, take a different form. Usually an apostrophe is added followed by the letter *s* (except for plurals, which take the plural "-s" ending first, and then add the apostrophe). See the section on **Possessives** for help with possessive forms. There is also a **table outlining the cases of nouns and pronouns**.

Almost all nouns change form when they become **plural**, usually with the simple addition of an -s or -es. Unfortunately, it's not always that easy, and a separate section on **Plurals** offers advice on the formation of plural noun forms.

Assaying for Nouns

Back in the gold rush days, every little town in the American Old West had an assayer's office, a place where wild-eyed prospectors could take their bags of ore for official testing, to make sure the shiny stuff they'd found was the real thing, not "fool's gold." We offer here some assay tests for nouns. There are two kinds of tests: formal and functional — what a word looks like (the endings it takes) and how a word behaves in a sentence.

Formal Tests

Does the word contain a noun-making morpheme? organizationation, misconceptionion, weirdness, statehood, governmentment, democracy, philistinismism, realtoror, tenacity, violinistist

Can the word take a plural-making morpheme? pencils, boxes

Can the word take a possessive-making morpheme? today's, boys'

Function Tests

Without modifiers, can the word directly follow an article and create a grammatical unit (subject, object, etc.)? the state, a napple, a crate

Can it fill the slot in the following sentence: "(The) _____ seem(s) all right." (or substitute other predicates such as unacceptable, short, dark, depending on the word's meaning)?

Testing the Tests:

With most nouns, the test is clear. "State," for example, can be a plural ("states"), become a possessive ("state's"), follow an article ("a/the state"), and fit in the slot ("the state seems all

