



Abilities & Education
Beyond people's expectations

Proper and common nouns

Nouns are the biggest word class in English and the word class gets bigger every day as new words are incorporated into the language. Words to do with innovations in technology like 'spyware' and 'blog', for example, are relatively new additions to our dictionaries.

So let's look at nouns more closely. Firstly, nouns can be divided into proper nouns and common nouns.

Proper nouns are the names of people like 'John' or 'Sarah', the names of places like 'London' or 'Moscow', and the names of institutions like the 'Red Cross'. Days of the week like 'Tuesday', months of the year like 'April', nationalities like 'Spanish', and languages like 'Catalan' are also considered to be proper nouns. How do we recognise a proper noun? It starts with a capital letter.

Nouns that are not proper nouns are common nouns like 'man', 'child', 'chair', 'apartment'. Common nouns can be singular or plural: 'one chair', 'two chairs'. Most nouns have a plural that ends in 's': 'apartment', 'apartments'. But there are many irregular plural forms, for example: 'man', 'men'; 'child', 'children'.

Words and the way they work together to form sentences create the grammatical system of the language, so it may be useful to think about where nouns come in sentences and what they are used for.

Nouns act as the subject of a sentence, for example, 'Birds sang in the trees'. The sentence is about birds so birds are the subject.

Nouns also act as the object of a sentence, for example, 'Birds sang songs in the trees'. It is songs that the birds sang so songs are the object.

Nouns often follow an article like 'the' or 'an' or 'a'.

And they often follow adjectives.

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Pronouns are used instead of nouns in a sentence, often because the noun has already been mentioned and it would be repetitive to use it again, e.g. *I saw John yesterday. He looked very well.* We use the pronoun *he* to avoid repeating the name *John*.

Personal pronouns refer to a specific person, thing or groups of people or things.

I, you, we, she, he, they

Possessive pronouns show who something belongs to.

mine, hers, yours

Demonstrative pronouns are pronouns that point to specific things. They indicate distance, whether something is close to or far from the speaker.

this, that, these, those

Reflexive pronouns refer back to the subject of the sentence, when the noun or pronoun is doing something to itself.

myself, yourself, themselves

Relative pronouns are used at the beginning of relative clauses and join two sentences together, e.g. *He's the man. He's wearing a hat. -> He's the man ... is wearing a hat.*

that, who, which, whose

Indefinite pronouns are pronouns that refer to something that is not definite or exact or specific.

something, anybody, no one