

# Count nouns and Non-count nouns

*Un étudiant doit avoir de la patience et du courage.*  
A student needs patience and courage.

## LESSON

### What is it?

In French as in English, nouns can be divided into different groups. Count nouns (*un livre, deux livres...*) and non-count nouns (you cannot count them: *du sable* → sand) are among these. It is important to identify them in French in order to determine the accompanying article, and if they are singular or plural.

### What is it like in English?

In English, it is less important to identify non-count nouns as they are not preceded by an article anyway:

I drink (some) water. → *Je bois de l'eau.*

Do you have (any) coffee? → *As-tu du café ?*

"Some" or "any" can be omitted in English and often, there won't be any article at all.

### What is it like in French?

#### 1. Nouns and partitives

- a.** Non-count nouns are usually preceded by the partitive article (*du, de la, des*).

*Le soir, je bois **du** vin et j'écoute **de la** musique.*

→ In the evening, I drink wine and listen to music.

- b.** When expressing a specific quantity or using the negation *pas*, the partitive article is replaced by *de*:

*Le soir, je bois **un peu de** vin et j'écoute **beaucoup de** musique.*

→ In the evening, I drink a little wine and listen to a lot of music.

*Je ne bois **pas de** vin et n'écoute **pas de** musique.*

→ I don't drink wine and don't listen to music.

- c.** Note that partitives are used with concrete as well as abstract non-count nouns or even proper nouns:

*Elle a **de l'argent**.* → She is well off.

*Je ressens **de la joie**.* → I feel joyful.

*Il joue **du** Mozart.* → He is playing Mozart.

#### 2. Some words are count nouns in French but non-count nouns in English:

##### English

advice  
applause  
audience  
business  
clothing  
damage  
data  
evidence  
furniture

##### French

*des conseils*  
*les applaudissements*  
*les spectateurs*  
*les affaires*  
*les vêtements*  
*les dégâts*  
*les données*  
*des preuves*  
*les meubles*

##### English

garbage/rubbish  
hair  
information  
knowledge  
luggage  
medicine  
pasta  
transportation

##### French

*les déchets*  
*les cheveux*  
*les renseignements*  
*les connaissances*  
*les baggages*  
*les médicaments*  
*les pâtes*  
*les transports*

Note the English equivalent of the following countable French nouns:

*un fruit* → a piece of fruit    *un pain* → a loaf of bread    *une nouvelle* → a piece of news

### Watch out!

Both *gens* and *personnes* mean "people". *Gens* is a non-count noun, whereas *personne* is a count noun. *Personne* can be in the singular or plural form:

*Une personne à la fois s'il vous plaît !* → One person at a time, please!

*Il y avait trois personnes à la réunion.* → They were three people at the meeting.

*Gens* can only be in the plural form. It refers to people in general and can be preceded by *beaucoup de*, *peu de*, *la plupart des* but as soon as you become more specific, you have to revert to *personnes*:

*Les gens sont généralement sympas.* → People are usually nice.

*Beaucoup de gens étaient à ma présentation et, à la fin, plusieurs personnes sont venues me dire merci.*

→ A lot people attended my presentation and at the end several (people) came to thank me.

## EXERCISES

### 1 Underline the correct answer in the following sentences.

- a. Les [gens / personnes] n'aiment pas quand on fume à côté d'eux.
- b. Il y a deux [gens / personnes] qui vous attendent.
- c. Combien de [gens / personnes] y a-t-il dans cette salle ?
- d. Fais attention à ce que les [gens / personnes] disent !
- e. Une [gens / personne] sonne à la porte.
- f. Plusieurs [gens / personnes] ont applaudi.
- g. La majorité des [gens / personnes] habitent en ville.
- h. Les [gens / personnes] pensent que tu as tort.
- i. De nombreuses [gens / personnes] pleuraient.

### 2 Fill in the gaps with the correct article or preposition.

Ma définition ..... bonheur : Pour moi, ..... bonheur, c'est d'avoir beaucoup ..... amis ou du moins d'être entouré ..... gens qui comptent pour moi. C'est aussi manger ..... bonnes choses, boire ..... vin délicieux, écouter ..... Bach et ressentir ..... calme ou ..... joie.

..... recette ..... succès : Ce sont souvent ..... mêmes ingrédients que l'on retrouve partout : un peu ..... chance, beaucoup ..... motivation, ..... expérience, ..... certain sens ..... ouverture et ..... affaires. Ne pas avoir ..... argent n'est pas toujours ..... obstacle.

**3 Translate the following sentences into French.**

- a. She took her luggage and left.  
→ .....
- b. Can one or two people help me please?  
→ .....
- c. I need some information.  
→ .....
- d. Many people feel that their data is unprotected.  
→ .....
- e. Take your medicine!  
→ .....
- f. This is a funny piece of news.  
→ .....
- g. She recommends two pieces of fruit per day.  
→ .....
- h. They have no money.  
→ .....
- i. A lot of people were present.  
→ .....
- j. I am not asking for advice but for information only.  
→ .....

**4 Free Writing: Describe the qualities that are necessary to become a success in a field of your choice using the partitive articles, expressions of quantity, count and non-count nouns.**

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