Countable and Uncountable Nouns

Changes of meaning and practical quantities

One noun, different meanings

Paper can mean a material; a paper can mean a newspaper, article or academic essay. Glass is a material; a glass is a drinking container. Countability belongs to a meaning, not just a word.

Food and servings

Coffee is normally uncountable as a drink. Two coffees can mean two servings. A chicken is an animal; chicken can mean its meat. Context explains the change.

Useful countable alternatives

Compare a job / work, a suitcase / luggage and a suggestion / advice. Use the countable alternative when you need to count individual items. The luggage is heavy.

Units and agreement

Three pieces of equipment; a pair of trousers. A pair is singular, but these trousers are plural. News is normally uncountable: The news is good. Count the unit when using a unit phrase.

Study the pattern, then the meaning

Compare the examples. Identify the rule and explain why it fits the situation. Create a new example of your own, then check that its meaning and grammatical form agree.