



# Do Nouns Count?

## Video Transcript

Perhaps you've heard it lamented that good writing is on the decline.

Why, it's pondered, is so much writing so bad? Fingers point to such lexical villains as texting, social media, emojis, and an ever-growing list of acronyms. OMG. LOL.

"Woe is us," linguists and editors wail. "Good writing is dead."

The problem with this assertion is that it's been made for centuries.

The 18th-century literary critic Dr. Samuel Johnson, described by The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography as "arguably the most distinguished man of letters in English history," said that Shakespeare couldn't put more than six lines together properly.

Turns out that even Shakespeare couldn't please them all.

No matter what level of writer you are now, learning rules of grammar will make you a better writer. You'll know when you must follow the rules, when you can bend them, and when you can break them.

Rule number one about breaking grammatical rules is – if you're writing a school paper, don't break the grammatical rules. Learn the rules, understand their subtleties, and follow them. If someday you become a fiction writer, bend and break the rules all you want. But, even then, if you know the formal guidelines you're tampering with, your creative innovations will be more effective.

Nouns, for instance, have subtle distinctions that can go unnoticed by the untrained writer.

Nouns can be either countable or uncountable. Most nouns are countable. Countable nouns have both a singular and a plural form.

Chair. Chairs.

Category. Categories.

Potato. Potatoes.

We can assign a number to countable nouns. These nouns are the majority.

The much smaller category known as uncountable nouns are nouns that cannot be counted. Since we can't count them, they have no need for a plural.

Rain.

Wood.

Milk.

The distinction between countable and uncountable nouns is important because certain words are used with nouns that can be counted, but not with nouns that cannot.

For instance, the word fewer is used with countable nouns.

Fewer chairs.

Fewer categories.

Fewer potatoes.

And the word less is used with uncountable nouns.

Less rain.

Less time.

Less milk.

We are talking about formal, academic writing, so you don't need to tell the grocery store manager that the sign "10 Items or Less" needs to be changed, unless you just happen to enjoy seeing him affect a perfunctory smile and get a "Here we go again" look on his face.

## About this transcript:

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