

B1 ENGLISH
CHAPTER 5 Lesson 2
Vocabulary:
Counting people and things
(Unit 83-88)

A

What are uncountable nouns?

Countable nouns can be used with **a/an** and made plural (e.g. **a hat, two hats**). Uncountable nouns are not normally used with a(n) or the plural, e.g. **information** (NOT ~~an information~~ or ~~some informations~~). You can learn uncountable nouns in groups associated with the same subject or area. Here are some useful headings.

B

Travel

luggage
baggage (more common than *luggage* in AmE)



accommodation



money
currency



information



transport

C

Food

The word **food** is usually uncountable, and so are many food names. Other uncountable food words can be added to this list.

sugar **rice** **spaghetti** **butter** **bread**
flour **soup**

Language help

Travel is an uncountable noun, e.g. *Travel broadens the mind.* If you want to refer to an individual occasion of travel, use **journey** or **trip**, e.g. *It was a very long journey.* (NOT ~~a very long travel~~) *She was away on a business trip for three days.* (NOT ~~a business travel~~)

D

Abstract uncountable nouns and nouns for activities

She gave me some **advice** on how to study for the exam.

I picked up some interesting **knowledge** on that course.

She's made a lot of **progress** in a very short time.

She has done some **research** on marine life.

They've done a lot of **work** on the project.

The teacher always gives us **homework** at the weekend.

Do you have any **experience** of working with children?

Wealth [state of being rich] does not guarantee happiness, but neither does **poverty**. [state of being poor]

E

Material and resources

For making clothes, furniture, etc.: **cloth** (e.g. silk)

leather

For energy: **coal**

oil

For buildings: **stone**

brick

plastic

General: **equipment**

software

F

Other common uncountable nouns

I have some **news** for you: Henry is getting married.

What lovely **weather**! Let's go for a walk.

Common mistakes

Although you may have learnt these words and their meanings before, it is very easy to continue making mistakes with them.

We say: *What **terrible weather**! I have **some news** for you. We bought **some new furniture**.*

(NOT ~~What a terrible weather!~~ I have ~~a news~~ for you. We bought ~~some new furnitures~~.)

See [Unit 86](#) for ways of making uncountable nouns countable.

Exercises

83.1 Complete each sentence in two ways using the nouns in brackets.

- 1 He gave me *(some) advice / some tips* about applying for university courses. (advice / tip)
- 2 I'm sorry, I can't come. I have to do. (job / homework)
- 3 She's doing teenage slang in English for her university project. (research into / study of)
- 4 You'll need if you want to make a Chinese meal. (rice / noodle)
- 5 I have for you: you're going to meet the President next week! (news / surprise)
- 6 They make for the furniture industry in this factory. (textile / cloth)

83.2 List these words under the headings in the table: *uncountables* and *countables*. Then pair up the words which have related meanings.

recommendation	money	bread	case	information	job	advice	travel
coin	trip	work	baggage	fact	loaf		

uncountables	money
countables	coin

83.3 Correct the mistakes in these sentences. There may be more than one.

- 1 We had such a terrible weather that we left the campsite and found ^{some}an accommodation in town instead.
- 2 In the south of England, most houses are made of stones, but in the north, bricks are more common.
- 3 I love antique furnitures, but I would need an advice from a specialist before I bought any. My knowledges in that area are very poor.
- 4 Her researches are definitely making great progresses these days. She has done a lot of original works recently.
- 5 What equipments do you need to go skiing? If you can give me any informations, I would be grateful.
- 6 Oil exports have produced a great deal of wealths for the country.
- 7 Package holidays often include transports from the airport to your accommodations.
- 8 I don't have any experiences of working in education, but I would like to do some voluntary works in a school.
- 9 A poverty is the biggest problem in many countries.
- 10 I bought a new software that shows you the kind of weathers every country has each month of the year.

83.4 Can you add more items to the lists in C and E opposite?

- Food: *olive oil, salt, milk, honey*
- For making clothes, furniture, etc.:
- For buildings:
- For energy:

83.5 Over to you

Imagine you are going away for a week's holiday and you pack a suitcase with everything you need. Make a list of what you would pack. Which items on your list are *uncountable* nouns in English?

A

Tools, instruments, pieces of equipment



B

Things we wear



C

Other useful words

The **graphics** in this game are amazing! [pictures produced on a computer]

When will the **goods** be delivered? [articles/items]

The architect inspected the **foundations** [under the building] before declaring that the **premises** were safe. [the building itself]

The military **authorities** have established their **headquarters** in the old Town Hall.

The **acoustics** in the new opera house are near perfect. [quality of the sound]

The **contents** /'kɒntents/ of the house were sold after her death.

Looks are less important than personality in a partner.

As you come to the **outskirts** of the village, there are **traffic lights**. Turn left there. [the beginning or end of the village]

The **stairs** are a bit dangerous - be careful.

The **proceeds** of the concert are going to the children's fund. [money from selling tickets]

A terrorist has escaped from prison. Her **whereabouts** are unknown. [where she is]

D

Words with plural form but used mostly with singular verbs

Names of some games: **billiards** **dominoes** **draughts** **darts** **bowls** **cards**

Names of subjects/activities: **physics** **economics** **classics** **gymnastics** **athletics**

Common mistakes

Some words look plural, or may be thought of as plural, but are not, e.g. **news**, **spaghetti** (an Italian plural form), **series**, **means**. *The news is good.* (NOT *The news are good.*) *The spaghetti was delicious.* (NOT *The spaghetti were delicious.*) *There was a series of programmes on TV about Japan.* *Is there a cheap means of transport I could use to get there?*

Exercises

84.1 Make a list of subjects you studied at school or elsewhere. How many of the words are plural? Use a dictionary if necessary.

84.2 Which things listed on the opposite page can be used to:

- 1 cut a hedge? *shears*

2 help you to read small print?

3 cut paper?

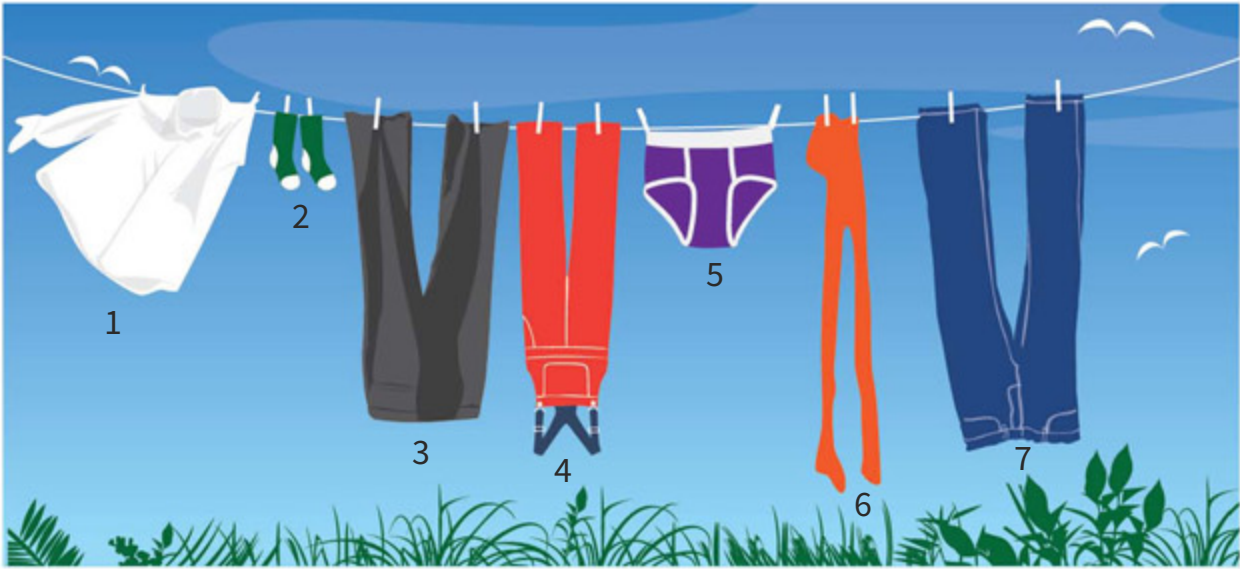
4 hold your trousers up?
- 5 protect your clothes if you're repairing a car?

6 look at distant objects?

7 get a nail out of a piece of wood?

8 keep a prisoner's hands together?

84.3 Name the items on the clothes line and tick the words that are only used in the plural.



1 *shirt* 2 3 4 5 6 7

84.4 Fill the gaps with an appropriate plural-form noun.

- 1 (to a child) Come on! Get your *pyjamas* on! It's time to go to bed.

2 The of the rock concert are going to two charities.

3 The in the new concert hall are superb. I've never heard such clear sound.

4 The escaped prisoner is tall, dark and has a beard. His are unknown.

5 You must use or if you want to listen to your music on a train.

6 The have forbidden the import of all foreign

7 Computer were first used in films in the 1970s.

84.5 Odd one out. In each group, one of the nouns is always used in the plural. Which one?

- 1 sock, trouser, slipper - *trousers*

3 knife, scissor, razor
- 2 billiard, squash, tennis

4 tracksuit, costume, dungaree

84.6 In this silly story, change the singular nouns to plural where appropriate. Change the verbs where necessary.

I decided that if I wanted to be a pop star I'd have to move to London. I finally got a room, but it was on the outskirts of the city. The owner didn't live on the premises, so I could make as much noise as I liked. The acoustics in the bathroom were fantastic, so I practised there. I made so much noise I almost shook the foundations! I went to the headquarters of the Musicians' Union, but a guy there said I just didn't have the right looks to be famous. Oh well, never mind!

Countable and uncountable nouns with different meanings

A

Countable and uncountable nouns

When we use a countable noun we are thinking of specific **things** that can be counted (e.g. two **glasses**). When we use an uncountable noun we are thinking of **stuff** or **material** or the **idea of a thing in general** (e.g. this door is made of **glass**).

stuff/materials	things
glass 	a glass / glasses 
cloth 	a cloth 
fish 	a fish 
work 	a work 

Be careful - there's broken **glass** on the road. I need a **cloth** to wipe the table.
We had **fish** for dinner. *Hamlet* is one of Shakespeare's most famous **works**.

Here are some more nouns that can be used in both ways with different meanings.

countable	uncountable
There's a black hair in my soup; it must be yours!	She has beautiful red hair .
Did you buy a paper this morning? [a newspaper]	The printer has run out of paper .
They are campaigning to help indigenous peoples of South America.	I love meeting people from different countries. [individuals]
Can I borrow your iron ? My shirt is a bit creased. [instrument]	People used to think ships made of iron would sink. [metal]
I had some interesting experiences during my trip to Latin America. [things that happened to me]	She has little work experience . [knowledge or skill obtained from doing something]
The city has a yearly arts festival. [music, theatre, etc.] He studied arts not sciences at uni. [subjects such as languages or history; always plural and without <i>the</i>]	Have you been to the modern art museum? It's wonderful. [usually refers to painting, drawing and sculpture]
I've seen that film three times . [occasions] We had some good times at university. [experiences]	Time passes very slowly if you have a boring job. [clock time, calendar time]

B

Food

The names of food items often have a different meaning depending on whether they are used as countable or uncountable nouns (see **fish** above).

coffee/tea 	→	a coffee and two teas 
potato 	→	Just two potatoes, please! 
Would you like some chocolate? 	→	Would you like a chocolate? 
salt and pepper 	→	a pepper 
a hot dog with onion 	→	an onion 

Exercises

85.1 Would you normally expect to find these things in most people’s houses, flats, garages or gardens? In which room or place? Answer for both meanings (countable and uncountable).

- 1 an iron / iron *Yes, most people have an iron to iron their clothes; they might keep it in the kitchen somewhere. Most people don’t normally keep iron (the metal) at home, but they might have things made of iron (e.g. a frying pan) in the kitchen.*
- 2 a cloth / cloth
- 3 a fish / fish
- 4 glass / a glass
- 5 a wood / wood
- 6 pepper / a pepper
- 7 paper / a paper

85.2 Which question would you ask? *Could I have/borrow a(n) ...?* or *Could I have/borrow some ...?*

1 cake *Could I have some cake?*



2 iron



3 pepper



4 chocolate



5 paper



6 rubber



7 glass



85.3 Complete the answers using the word in brackets. Use *a(n)* or *the* if the meaning is countable.

- 1 Oh dear! I’ve spilt water on the floor! (cloth) Never mind. Here’s *a cloth – just wipe it up.*
- 2 How did you get that puncture in your car tyre? (glass) I drove
- 3 (child) Daddy, what are car tyres made of? (rubber) They’re made
- 4 Have you worked in a primary school before? (experience) No, I don’t
- 5 I wonder who won the general election in Sweden? (paper) We could buy
- 6 (child) Mum, what’s the Mona Lisa? (work) It’s
- 7 What’s your favourite ice-cream flavour? (chocolate) My favourite

85.4 What is the difference between (a) and (b) in each pair? Check in a dictionary if you’re not sure.

- 1 a She was always a great lover of the arts.
b Are you an art lover?
a **Arts** here means *theatre, music, etc.* b **Art** here means
- 2 a (road sign) PLANT AND HEAVY MACHINERY CROSSING
b I’ve bought you a house plant.
a **Plant** here means b **A plant** here means
- 3 a There was a lot of damage to the car as a result of the accident.
b The film star won \$500,000 in damages because the story in the newspaper was untrue.
a **Damage** here means b **Damages** here means
- 4 a I’ve had some bad times at the dentist’s!
b How many times have you been to the dentist’s this year?
a **Times** here means b **Times** here means

A

Bit and piece

You can make many uncountable nouns singular and countable by adding **a piece of** or **a (little) bit of**. Similarly, you can make such nouns plural with **pieces of** or **bits of**. **Bit** is less formal than **piece** and they are not always interchangeable. **Bit** can be used with all types of nouns. **Piece** tends to be used more with uncountable nouns. **Bit** suggests a smaller amount than **piece**.

How many **pieces of** luggage have you got with you?

The police collected **bits of** information from different sources.

Chopin wrote some wonderful **pieces of** music.

Before you go to England I should give you two **bits of** advice ...

He spends all his money buying new **bits of** computer equipment.

Common mistakes

We say: *What an attractive piece of **furniture**!* (NOT *What an attractive furniture!*)

B

Words that go with specific uncountable nouns

Weather

FORECAST



rain



sun



lightning



wind

Today's weather will be variable. In the north there are likely to be heavy **showers (of rain)**. The **sunny spell (of weather)** that we have had this last week will continue in much of the south although there may be occasional **rumbles of thunder** and **flashes of lightning** in some areas with some quite loud **claps of thunder** in one or two areas. These will be followed by a few **spots of rain** but **gusts of wind** should soon blow them away and the sunshine will then return.

See [Unit 6](#) for more weather words.

Groceries

'I need a **loaf of** bread, a couple of **slices of** ham, two **bars of** chocolate, a **tube of** toothpaste, two **cartons of** milk and three **bars of** soap.' (**slice** can also be used with *toast*, *bread*, *meat* and *cheese*)

Nature

Look at the ladybird on that **blade of** grass!

What's happened? Look at that **cloud of** smoke hanging over the town!

We could see little **puffs of** smoke coming out of the volcano.

Let's go out and get a **breath of** fresh air.

Put another **lump of** coal on the fire, please. (**lump** can also be used with *sugar*)

Other words

I had an amazing **stroke of** luck this morning.

I've never seen him do a **stroke of** work. (only in negative sentences, more emphatic than a **bit of work**)

I've never seen him in such a **fit of** temper before.

The donkey is the basic **means of** transport on the island.

Jeans must be the most useful **article/item of** clothing ever invented.

There was an interesting **item of** news about France on TV last night.

C

A state of

Nouns used with **a state of** are usually abstract and include **chaos**, **tension**, **confusion**, **health**, **disorder**, **uncertainty**, **poverty**, **agitation**, **disrepair** and **flux** [continuous change], e.g. The transport system is in **a state of** chaos.

Exercises

86.1 Match the words on the left with the words they collocate with on the right.

- 1 a stroke

2 a shower

3 an article

4 a lump

5 a flash

6 a blade

7 an item

8 a rumble
- h

of

a lightning

b coal

c grass

d news

e rain

f clothing

g thunder

h luck

86.2 Change the uncountable nouns to countable nouns in the following sentences by using *piece*, *bit* or one of the more specific words from B.

- 1 Could you buy me some bread, please? *Could you buy me a loaf of bread, please?*

2 My mother gave me some advice that I have always remembered.

3 Suddenly the wind almost blew him off his feet.

4 We had some terribly windy weather last winter.

5 Would you like some more toast?

6 He never does any work at all in the house.

7 Let's go to the park - I need some fresh air.

8 I can give you some important information about that.

9 We could see smoke hovering over the city from a long way away.

10 I need to get some furniture for my flat.

86.3 Use words from C opposite to fit the clues for the puzzle below.

- 1 The reforms mean that the country's education system is in a state of at the moment but hopefully things will soon settle down.

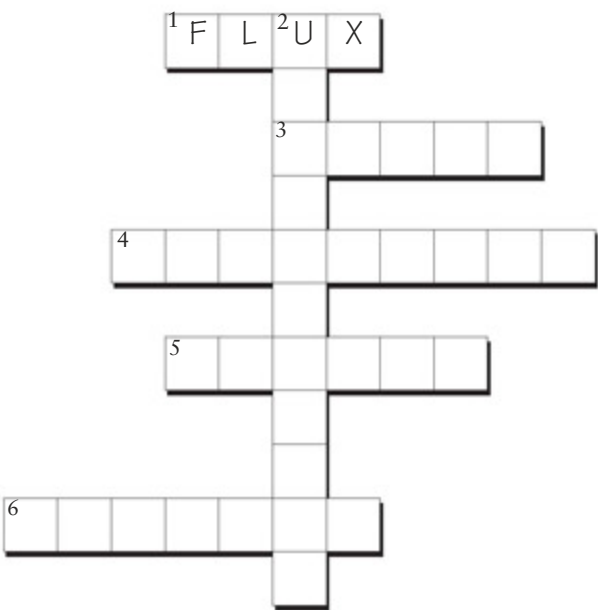
2 We are still in a state of as to who has won the election.

3 The country's infrastructure is in a state of after the earthquake.

4 We fell in love with the house although it was in a dreadful state of

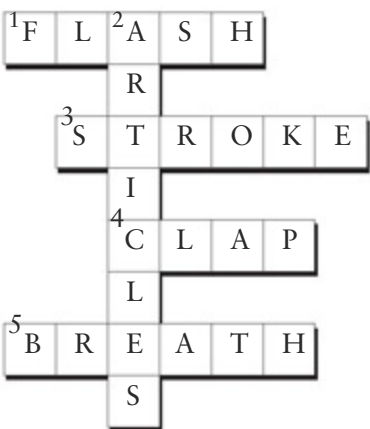
5 My granny wouldn't be in such a bad state of now if she hadn't smoked all her life.

6 Although this is supposed to be an affluent society, many people are still living in a state of



86.4 Over to you

Make up sentence clues like those in 86.3 to match this puzzle.



A

People

Collective nouns are used to describe a **group** of the same people or things.



a **group** of people
(smaller number)



a **crowd** of people
(large number)



a **gang** of thieves
(rather negative)

B

Words associated with certain animals

A **flock** of sheep or birds, e.g. geese/pigeons; a **herd** of cows, deer, goats; a **shoal** of fish (or any particular fish, e.g. a **shoal** of herring/mackerel - note the use of singular here); a **swarm** /sw m/ of insects (typically flying ones, e.g. a **swarm** of bees/gnats).

A **pack** of ... can be used for dogs, hyenas, wolves, etc. as well as for (playing) cards.

C

People involved in the same job/activity

These nouns are used with singular or plural verbs, depending on your point of view.

A **team** of reporters/rescue workers was/were at the scene of the disaster.

The **crew** was/were saved when the ship sank. [workers on a ship/ambulance/plane]

The **company** is/are rehearsing a new production. [group of actors]

The **cast** is/are all amateurs. [actors in a film or theatre production]

The **public** has/have a right to know the truth. [the people as a whole]

The **staff** are on strike. (normally used with a plural verb; general word for groups who share a place of work, e.g. teachers in a school, people in an office)

D

Physical features of landscapes

In the picture we can see a **row** of cottages near a **clump** of trees with a **range** of hills in the background. Out on the lake there is a small **group** of islands.



E

Things in general

a **pair** of birds sitting on a branch [two of anything that are the same]

a **couple** of strawberries [vague way of saying two, not necessarily exactly the same]

a **pile/heap** of papers (or clothes, dishes, toys, etc.)

a **bunch** of flowers (or grapes, bananas, etc.)

a **stack** of chairs (or tables, boxes, logs, etc.)

a **set** of tools (or pots and pans, dishes, etc.)



Exercises

87.1 Fill each gap with a suitable collective noun.

- 1 There are swarms of mosquitoes in the forests in Scandinavia in the summer.
- 2 As we looked into the water, we saw a _____ of brightly coloured fish.
- 3 There was a _____ of youths on the corner; they didn't look very friendly.
- 4 There's a _____ of cards on the bookshelf. Will you fetch them for me, please?
- 5 A _____ of biologists is studying marine life in this area.
- 6 Look at that _____ of birds on that tree. Both of them have beautiful markings. I wonder what they are?
- 7 Could you put a _____ of spoons of sugar in this coffee for me, please? It's very bitter. Yes, just two, that's fine. Thanks.

87.2 In each case, one of the examples is wrong. Which one? Put a line through it.

- 1 Company is often used for *actors / swimmers / opera singers*.
- 2 Cast is often used for people in *a play / a book / a film*.
- 3 Crew is often used for the staff of *an ambulance / a plane / a hospital*.
- 4 Pack is often used for *cats / dogs / wolves*.
- 5 Flock is often used for *sheep / pigeons / pigs*.
- 6 Herd is often used for *cows / fish / goats*.

87.3 Match the collective nouns on the left with the words on the right.

- | | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1 a clump of | ☒ | a houses |
| 2 a range of | ☐ | b flies |
| 3 a gang of | ☐ | c fir trees |
| 4 a swarm of | ☐ | d deer |
| 5 a row of | ☐ | e grapes |
| 6 a heap of | ☐ | f mountains |
| 7 a herd of | ☐ | g criminals |
| 8 a bunch of | ☐ | h bed linen |

87.4 Rewrite these sentences using collective nouns. Don't forget to change the verb to singular or plural where necessary.

- 1 There are some tables on top of one another in the next room.
There is a stack of tables in the next room.
- 2 There are a large number of people waiting outside. _____
- 3 The people who work there are very well paid. _____
- 4 A large number of sheep had escaped from a field. _____
- 5 She gave me six identical glasses. _____
- 6 She gave me five or six beautiful roses. _____

87.5 Some collective nouns are associated with words about using language. Underline any you can see in this text, check their meanings in a dictionary and make a note of them in your vocabulary notebook.

THE journalists raised a host of difficult questions about the actions of the police during the demonstration. There had been a barrage of complaints about police violence. The Chief of Police replied that he was not prepared to listen to a string of wild accusations without any evidence. In the end, he just gave a series of short answers that left everyone dissatisfied.

A



B

More information about these containers

container	usually made of	typical contents
bag	cloth, paper, plastic	sweets, shopping, mail
barrel	wood and metal	oil, wine, beer
basket	wicker, metal	shopping, clothes, waste paper
bottle	glass, plastic	milk, lemonade, wine
bowl	china, glass, wood	fruit, soup, sugar
box	cardboard, wood	matches, tools, toys, chocolates
bucket	metal, plastic	sand, water
can	tin	cola, beer
carton	card	milk, juice
case	leather, wood, cardboard	jewellery, spectacles, wine
crate	wood, plastic	bottles
glass	glass	milk, water, wine
jar	glass, pottery	jam, honey, olives, instant coffee
jug	pottery	milk, cream, water
mug	pottery	tea, coffee, cocoa
pack	card	cards, six cans of cola/beer
packet	card, paper, plastic	tea, biscuits, cereal, crisps
pan	metal	food that is being cooked
pot	plastic, metal, pottery	yoghurt, plant, paint
sack	cloth, plastic	coal, rubbish
tin	tin	tomatoes, sardines, fruit
tub	wood, plastic, card	flowers, rainwater, ice cream
tube	soft metal, plastic	toothpaste, paint, ointment

Exercises

88.1 Complete the blanks in the shopping list without looking at the opposite page.

1 a *tube* of toothpaste

2 two of milk

3 four of cola

4 a of tuna

5 a of chocolate biscuits

6 a of yoghurt

7 a large of matches

8 a of honey

9 six of crisps

88.2 Try the following quiz about the words on the opposite page.

- 1 Which two of the containers listed would you be most likely to find holding flowers in a garden?
a pot, a tub
- 2 Which three are you most likely to find in a cellar?
- 3 Which five of these would you be most likely to see in the drinks section of a large supermarket?
- 4 Which five would you be most likely to see on the breakfast table?
- 5 Which two containers might a postman carry the post in and which is bigger?
- 6 Which two are often used for carrying shopping?

88.3 Name the containers and their contents.



1 *a jar of peanut butter*



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11



12

88.4 Think of other words which are often used with the following containers.

- 1 *shopping, wastepaper, linen*

2

3

4

basket

box

bottle

bag

5

6

7

jug

glass

pot