

Proper Nouns and Common Nouns: The Two Families of Names

You have already learned that a noun is a word that names a person, place, thing, or idea. But did you know that nouns belong to two different families? Some nouns are common, and some nouns are proper. Learning the difference between these two families is very easy, and it will make your English much better. This essay will show you how to identify common nouns and proper nouns quickly and simply.

What is a Common Noun?

A “common noun” is a general name for a person, place, thing, or idea. The word “common” means “general” or “ordinary.” A common noun does not name one specific thing. It names any member of a group.

For example, think of the word “city”. This is a common noun because there are many cities in the world. New York is a city. Paris is a city. Tokyo is a city. But the word “city” alone does not tell you which one. Other examples of common nouns are boy, teacher, school, dog, car, month, and day.

- **Here is an easy rule:** “Common nouns are NOT written with a capital letter” unless they start a sentence. You write “I saw a dog,” not “I saw a Dog.” You write “She likes her teacher,” not “She likes her Teacher.”

What is a Proper Noun?

A “proper noun” is a specific name for a particular person, place, thing, or idea. The word “proper” here means “specific” or “unique.” A proper noun names one exact thing, not any thing.

For example, think of the name “Maria”. This is a proper noun because it names one specific girl. There is only one Maria that you are talking about. Other examples of proper nouns are “John, London, Microsoft, Toyota, Monday, January, and Christmas”.

- **Here is the most important rule:** “Proper nouns ALWAYS begin with a capital letter.” This is true no matter where they appear in a sentence. You write “I live in London,” not “i live in london.” You write “My friend is John,” not “My friend is john.”



- **How to Tell Them Apart: A Simple Test**

If you are confused, ask yourself one question: “Does this word name one specific thing or any thing like it?”

Let us practice with the word “ocean”. Is it common or proper? The word “ocean” is a common noun because it names any ocean. There is the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, and the Indian Ocean. But the name “Pacific Ocean” is a proper noun because it names one specific ocean.

Here is another example. The word “day” is a common noun. There are 365 days in a year. But the word Friday is a proper noun because it names one specific day. The word “month” is a common noun. The word “January” is a proper noun.

Seeing Them Together in Sentences

Look at these sentences. The common nouns are small letters, and the proper nouns begin with capital letters.

- Sentence 1: The girl went to the store.

- Girl and store are common nouns.
- They are not specific.

- Sentence 2: Anna went to Walmart.

- Anna is a proper noun (a specific girl).
- Walmart is a proper noun (a specific store).

- Sentence 3: My teacher is from Canada.

- Teacher is a common noun (any teacher).
- Canada is a proper noun (a specific country).

- Sentence 4: I love eating pizza on Saturday.

- Pizza is a common noun (any pizza).
- Saturday is a proper noun (a specific day).



Common Mistakes to Avoid

True beginners often make two small mistakes. Do not worry, everyone makes them!

- **Mistake #1:** Writing a proper noun with a small letter.
 - **Wrong:** i live in new york.
 - **Correct:** I live in New York.
- **Mistake #2:** Writing a common noun with a capital letter.
 - **Wrong:** She has a Cat.
 - **Correct:** She has a cat.

Remember: Only proper nouns need capital letters (unless the common noun is the first word of the sentence).

A Final Easy Trick

Here is a final trick to help you. Think of common nouns as first names for groups. Think of proper nouns as full names for specific things.

- River is a common noun (any river). The Nile River is a proper noun.
- President is a common noun (any president). George Washington is a proper noun.
- Restaurant is a common noun. McDonald's is a proper noun.

Conclusion

Now you know the two families of nouns. Common nouns are general names. They are not capitalized (unless they start a sentence). Proper nouns are specific names. They are always capitalized. When you write in English, always ask yourself: "Is this a general thing or one specific thing?" If it is one specific thing, use a capital letter. With a little practice, you will never confuse them again. And that is a very good thing for a true beginner to learn!

EXAM: PROPER NOUNS & COMMON NOUNS

Section 1: Multiple Choice

Circle the correct answer.

- 1) **A common noun is a:**
 - a) Specific name for one thing
 - b) General name for any person, place, or thing
 - c) Always capitalized word
 - d) Name of a day
- 2) **A proper noun is a:**
 - a) General name
 - b) Word that never uses a capital letter
 - c) Specific name for a particular person, place, or thing
 - d) Type of verb
- 3) **Which word is a proper noun?**
 - a) city
 - b) dog
 - c) London
 - d) teacher
- 4) **Which word is a common noun?**
 - a) Maria
 - b) Monday
 - c) January
 - d) month
- 5) **Proper nouns ALWAYS begin with:**
 - a) A small letter
 - b) A capital letter
 - c) A number
 - d) A period
- 6) **Common nouns are NOT written with a capital letter unless:**
 - a) They are at the end of a sentence
 - b) They start a sentence
 - c) They are very important
 - d) They are long words



7) Which sentence is correct?

- a) I live in london.
- b) I live in London.
- c) i live in London.
- d) I live in london.

8) Which word is a proper noun?

- a) ocean
- b) river
- c) Pacific Ocean
- d) country

9) “Teacher” is a:

- a) Proper noun
- b) Common noun
- c) Verb
- d) Adjective

10) “Saturday” is a:

- a) Common noun
- b) Proper noun
- c) Verb
- d) Preposition

Section 2: True or False

Write TRUE or FALSE for each statement.

- Common nouns are always capitalized.
- Proper nouns name one specific person, place, or thing.
- The word “city” is a proper noun.
- The word “January” is a common noun.
- Proper nouns always begin with a capital letter.
- The sentence “She has a Dog” is correct.
- “River” is a common noun.
- “The Nile River” is a proper noun.
- Common nouns are general names.
- You should write “I went to school” not “I went to School”.

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Section 3: Short Answer

1) Answer the following questions in complete sentences.

2) What is a common noun? Give two examples.

3) What is a proper noun? Give two examples.

4) Why do we write "I love pizza" but "I love Pizza Hut"?

5) Is the word "ocean" a common or proper noun? Why?

6) Is the word "Friday" a common or proper noun? Why?

Section 4: Real Case / Application Section

Read the paragraph below. Then complete the exercises.

**My name is Carlos. I am from Mexico. My favorite teacher is Miss Sarah. She teaches at Lincoln High School. On Saturdays, I go to the park with my dog Rocky. I also like to eat pizza and watch movies. My favorite movie is Toy Story.

- Part A: Find the proper nouns
- Write all the proper nouns from the paragraph.

- Part B: Find the common nouns
- Write all the common nouns from the paragraph.

- Part C: Correct the mistakes
- Rewrite each sentence correctly.

i live in mexico city.

She has a Cat named fluffy.

My friend is john.

We go to school on monday.

I love disney world.

 BONUS (Optional)

Write two sentences of your own.

One sentence with a common noun (underline it)

One sentence with a proper noun (circle it)

PROPER NOUNS & COMMON NOUNS – Beneficios para el alumno

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- ☒  Diferencia entre **common nouns** (persona, ciudad, día) y **proper nouns** (Maria, Londres, lunes)
- ☒  Aprende que los **proper nouns** siempre empiezan con **mayúscula**
- ☒  Nombra correctamente personas, lugares y cosas en tus conversaciones
- ☒  Ejemplos claros: *teacher (common)* → *Teacher Luis (proper)*
- ☒  Evita errores comunes al escribir en inglés
- ☒  Obtén certificación ELAC con valor profesional

 *Common = general. Proper = específico. ¡Aprende a usarlos bien en inglés!*

 **Modalidad:** En línea o presencial

 **Imparte:** Teacher Luis Córdoba

¿Necesitas otro taller o ajustar algo más? 