Nouns: Advanced

Common Nouns

Common nouns are nouns that fall into the classic definition of a person, place, or thing. They often follow articles, possessives, or numbers.

Examples:	We went to the *city* to celebrate the *holiday*.
	I placed my *book* on the *table*.
	Joaquin ate three *sandwiches*.

Proper Nouns

Proper nouns fall into the same definition, but they specifically name the person, place, or thing to which they refer. They rarely follow articles, possessives, or numbers.

Examples:	We went to *New York* to celebrate *Thanksgiving*.
	He bought *Melanie* two dozen flowers.
	I work at *Costco*.

Articles, possessives, or numbers may precede proper nouns only in cases where they achieve a specific purpose.

Examples:	*The Christmas* of 2003 was quite memorable.
	(The article *the* lets us know that we are referring to a specific Christmas.)
	My San Francisco is not the one you see in the movies.
	(The possessive *my* lets us know that we are experiencing the writer's specific version of a place based on his or her own experiences.)
	Disreputable sources have often claimed that there exist *two Americas*.
	(The *two* in this case lets us know again that there may be varying versions of the same place.)
	Mom came over last week.
	My mom came over last week.
	(*Mom* without the possessive *my* in front of it is a proper noun since it directly names her. With the possessive *my*, it is a common noun.)

In many cases, the article has become part of the proper name.

Example:	I read in *the San Jose Mercury News* that *the San Francisco Giants* will be participating in a charity swim event to benefit *the Oakland Zoo*. (Note that *the* is never capitalized. The articles preceding these proper nouns are not part of their official name.)

Pronouns

Pronouns are used to reference nouns, common or proper, that have been mentioned already. Pronouns are words like *he, she, we, I,* and *it*. Pronouns can also be used to show possession: *his, hers, ours, my*, or *its*.

Examples:	Jim is absent-minded; *he* always seems to be elsewhere. The city is massive, *its* towers blotting out the sun.

Features

Semantic (meaning) features define nouns:
- Nouns can be human or non-human, animate or inanimate.
- Non-human nouns cannot perform the same actions as human nouns.
- Nouns can be animate but non-human.
- The same rules apply for animate and inanimate nouns.

Examples:	Sophie's *sandwich* is planning to run a 5K. (This sentence is nonsense because a *sandwich* cannot plan nor can it run.) My *dog* writes beautiful poetry. (My *dog* is animate and can therefore perform actions, but it cannot perform the same actions, such as writing poetry, as a human.) The *dog* played with the *tennis ball*. The *tennis ball* played with the *dog*. (The first sentence is fine since the *dog* can play with the *tennis ball*, but the *tennis ball* is inanimate and therefore cannot perform the action in the second sentence.)

Activity

Underline the common nouns in the following sentences.
1. We arrived to school early yesterday.
2. We saw whales, sea lions, and starfish at the aquarium.
3. My car was stolen last night.

4. My niece loves to see the bears at the zoo.
5. The children were devastated to learn that school had been cancelled.

Underline the proper nouns that should be capitalized in the following sentences.
6. Have you seen mom?
7. My mom went with me to los angeles.
8. We drove to houston in my honda.
9. My convertible makes me feel like famous author hunter thompson.
10. I have a daschund named killer and another dog named snoopy.

Answer Key for Activity
1. school, yesterday
2. whales, sea lions, starfish, aquarium
3. car, night
4. niece, bears, zoo
5. children, school
6. Mom
7. Los Angeles
8. Houston, Honda
9. Hunter Thompson
10. Daschund, Killer, Snoopy