


Partitives and Assemblages in English

Partitives

		
General partitives	Typical partitives	Restricted partitives
<p><i>bit</i> <i>item</i> <i>piece</i> <i>touch</i></p>	<p><i>act</i> <i>ball</i> <i>bar</i> <i>case</i> <i>cloud</i> <i>cluster</i> <i>coat</i> <i>dab</i> <i>drip</i> <i>drop</i> <i>flash</i> <i>game</i></p>	<p><i>grain</i> <i>jar</i> <i>lump</i> measures: <i>pint, meter, acre etc.</i> <i>pile</i> <i>plate</i> <i>sheet</i> <i>slice</i> <i>speck</i> <i>work</i></p> <p><i>blade (of grass)</i> <i>clove (of garlic)</i> <i>ear (of cereal crop)</i> <i>glimmer (of light)</i> <i>gust (of wind)</i> <i>loaf (of bread)</i> <i>lock (of hair)</i> <i>pane (of glass)</i> <i>pat (of butter)</i> <i>peal (of bells or laughter)</i> <i>rasher (of bacon)</i> <i>scoop (of ice-cream)</i> <i>stroke (of luck or genius)</i></p>

Common typical and restricted partitives

Partitive	Nouns
<i>act</i>	mass nouns for abstract behaviours: <i>kindness, stupidity, meanness, war</i> etc.
<i>ball</i>	mass or count nouns which come in lines: <i>string, wool, thread, elastic bands</i> etc.
<i>bar</i>	mass nouns which come in regular blocks: <i>soap, chocolate</i> etc.
<i>barrel</i>	mass nouns for liquids: <i>beer, wine, oil</i> etc.
<i>bottle</i>	mass nouns for liquid stored in tall, thin, glass containers: <i>milk, beer, lemonade, olive oil</i> etc.
<i>bowl</i>	mass or count nouns, usually mass, for liquid or semi-liquids, often foodstuffs: <i>soup, cereal, porridge</i> etc.
<i>box</i>	mass and count nouns for materials kept in cubic or cylindrical containers: <i>jewellery, cereal, chocolates</i> etc.
<i>can</i>	+ mass or count nouns for items stored in a particular type of metal container: <i>soup, beans, beer, oil, paint, petrol</i> etc. AmE for all such items, BrE also <i>tin of</i> (cf.)
<i>case</i>	mass nouns for abstract actions: <i>forgetfulness, dishonesty, mistaken identity</i> etc.
<i>cloud</i>	mass nouns for gases, chemicals etc.: <i>dust, smoke, poison, fumes</i> etc.
<i>cluster</i>	count nouns for item held together or in close proximity: <i>stars, cottages, cases (disease), customers</i> etc.
<i>coat</i>	mass nouns for coverings: <i>paint, cement, varnish</i> etc.
<i>crate</i>	count nouns for glass containers: <i>bottles, wine, beer</i> etc.
<i>dab</i>	mass nouns for viscous liquids: <i>perfume, oil, paint, grease, blood</i> etc.
<i>drop</i>	mass nouns for free-flowing liquids: <i>water, alcohol, rain</i> etc.
<i>fit</i>	mass nouns for sudden emotions: <i>anger, generosity, pique</i> etc.

<i>flash</i>	mass and count nouns for lights and colours: <i>light, green, lightning</i> etc. Also metaphorical: <i>inspiration, genius</i> etc.
<i>game</i>	games and sports (usually mass nouns): <i>chess, cricket, tennis</i> etc.
<i>grain</i>	mass nouns for small pieces of material: <i>dust, salt, sand, sugar</i> etc.
<i>heap</i>	mass or count nouns for objects in unorganised groups: <i>books, sand, earth, papers, chairs</i> etc.
<i>jar</i>	mass and count nouns kept in glass containers: <i>jam, cream, onions, marmalade, pickles</i> etc.
<i>lump</i>	mass nouns for irregularly shaped materials: <i>coal, concrete, iron</i> etc.
<i>measures</i>	specific ones for length, square measures, liquids etc.: <i>gallon, mile, hectare</i> etc.
<i>packet</i>	mass or usually count nouns for dry foodstuffs etc.: <i>raisins, biscuits, sweets</i> etc.
<i>pile</i>	mass or count nouns for tangible objects which can be placed in vertical series: <i>sand, furniture, books, ash</i> etc.
<i>pinch</i>	mass nouns for small pieces of material held between thumb and finger: <i>salt, spice, dust</i> etc.
<i>plate</i>	mass nouns for thin stiff materials and foods: <i>vegetables, glass, steel</i> etc.
<i>portion</i>	all types of food (count and mass): <i>vegetables, meat, fish</i> etc.
<i>punnet</i>	count nouns for soft berry fruit: <i>strawberries, raspberries</i> etc.
<i>reel</i>	mass nouns for long, thin materials: <i>cotton, string, tape</i> etc.
<i>roll</i>	flexible materials (mass and count) which can be made cylindrical: <i>wallpaper, labels, sticky tape, carpet</i> etc.
<i>row</i>	usually count nouns denoting items which are arranged horizontally: <i>books, houses, huts, chairs</i> etc.
<i>scrap</i>	mass nouns for small, flexible materials, usually insignificant: <i>paper, cardboard, cloth</i> etc.
<i>sheet</i>	mass nouns for thin materials: <i>glass, paper, ice</i> etc.
<i>slice</i>	mass nouns for certain types of food: <i>cake, pizza, bread, sausage, banana</i> etc.
<i>speck</i>	very small amounts of mass nouns for materials: <i>dust, dirt, ink, paint</i>
<i>stack</i>	flat or cuboid count and (rarely) mass nouns which can be vertically arranged: <i>books, tiles, cards, paper, bricks, dice, files</i> etc.
<i>tin</i>	mass or count nouns kept in a specific type of metal container: <i>paint, beans, soup, fruit</i> etc. BrE usually (cf. <i>can of</i>).
<i>torrent</i>	fast flowing mass nouns for liquids: <i>water, sewage, oil</i> etc.
<i>work</i>	cultural mass nouns: <i>literature, art, fiction, genius</i> etc.

Assemblages

(Lists of fanciful and invented assemblage nouns for animals such as *a pace of asses* and so on are available via a brief web search but are not useful for most teaching settings and of dubious provenance and reliability.)

Assembly	+	Typical nouns
Animals		
<i>flock</i>	+	<i>birds</i> although there are fanciful names for particular types of birds. However, also <i>a flock of sheep</i> .
<i>herd</i>		mainly large animals: <i>antelopes, horses, kangaroos, cattle, deer, oxen</i> etc.
<i>litter</i>		young animals: <i>kittens, puppies, cubs</i> etc. For birds, especially unhatched eggs, a <i>clutch of</i> is conventional.
<i>pack</i>		carnivores: <i>dogs, wolves, hyenas</i> etc. However, <i>a pride of lions</i> .
<i>pod</i>		cetaceans: <i>whales, dolphins, porpoises</i>
<i>shoal</i>		<i>fish</i>
<i>swarm</i>		small animals and insects in particular: <i>ants, flies, bees, wasps, termites</i> etc. Metaphorically this also applies to things which look small and undifferentiated from a distance (<i>a swarm of people, school children</i> etc.)
Things		
<i>batch</i>	+	items dealt with at the same time: <i>loaves, cakes, examination papers, letters, emails, reports, surveys</i> etc. The term is also used to apply to people dealt with in groups, <i>children, patients, students, applicants</i> etc.
<i>bunch</i>		fruit which hangs from the plant or something which looks very similar: <i>grapes, bananas, flowers, keys</i> etc. This is also used metaphorically for any unorganised group of items or people (<i>bunch of clubbers, customers, students, papers, trees, rags</i> etc.)
<i>fleet</i>		<i>ships, boats, buses and cars</i>
<i>flight</i>		<i>aircraft, steps or stairs</i>
<i>set</i>		matching items: <i>cutlery, crockery, plates, (golf) clubs, teeth, jewellery, furniture, chess pieces</i> etc.
People		
<i>band</i>	+	musicians and criminals: <i>orchestra players, thieves, robbers, highwaymen</i> etc.
<i>company</i>		performers: <i>actors, dancers, players, singers</i> etc.
<i>field</i>		individual, competing sports people: <i>runners, athletes, riders, players</i> etc. (Also <i>crops</i> .)
<i>gang</i>		hand workers: <i>workmen, labourers, builders</i> etc. (A <i>crew of</i> is also used, especially, but not solely, for <i>seamen</i> and others working on the water (<i>rowers, yachters, fishers, sailors</i> etc.)
<i>horde</i>		aggressive people: <i>savages, attackers, hooligans, rioters</i> etc.
<i>team</i>		sports people and workers: <i>footballers, cricketers, baseball players, workers, designers, doctors, programmers</i> etc.