

few

and little

with nouns



COMMON MISTAKES IN WRITING vol.2

Learn from other students' mistakes to avoid making them yourself.

few (before plural countable nouns)
A small number of things or people.

- Very few people turned up for the party.
- We get few complaints.

Little (before uncountable nouns)
Only a small amount or hardly any of something.

- There's little time left – we need to start now.
- There's little doubt in my mind that he's guilty.

fewer (before plural countable nouns)
A smaller number of things or people.

- We received fewer complaints than expected.
- Fewer and fewer people are going out for a walk in the countryside.

Less (before uncountable nouns)
a smaller amount or not as much.

- Doctors recommend eating less salt.
- People today seem to have less time for each other.

the fewest (before plural countable nouns)
We use fewest to talk the smallest number of things or people. The fewest is the superlative form of few.

- John made the fewest mistakes.
- This is the city where the fewest people live.

the least (before uncountable nouns)
We use the least with a noun to mean 'less than all of the others'. (The) least is the superlative form of little

- She earns the least money of all of us.
- He did the least work of any of us.

a few (before plural countable nouns)
A few means 'a small number, for example two or three people or things'.

- A few people were waiting.
- I called him a few days later.

a little (before uncountable nouns)
A little means a small amount of something.

- With a little training she could do very well.
- This sauce needs a little salt.
- Susan speaks a little French.

a few of
We use "a few of" before determiners (articles, possessives, etc) or plural pronouns to talk about a small number of something.

- A few of my friends came too.
- I like his books. I've read a few of them.

a little of
We use "a little of" before determiners (articles, possessives, etc) or singular pronouns to talk about a small amount of something.

- He only kept a little of his money with him.
- I love this glue. A little of it goes a long way.

"less" for time and money

Time and money can get a bit confusing. That is because even though you are describing the plural "years/euros", you are talking about a singular chunk. In this case, you would use "less" to describe that chunk of time or money.

- She completed her internship in **less than three years**. / She made **less than 10 euros**.
 - In **less than four years**, she'll be back home. / The tip was **less than 5 pounds** for the meal.
- Since these are talking about a singular chunk of time or money, "less" is the right word.

"less" with plural countable nouns

You will often hear less used with plural countable nouns in informal spoken situations, but traditionally **it is not considered to be correct**:

- ✗ We've got less pizzas than we need. There's ten people and only eight pizzas.
- ✓ (traditionally correct usage: We've got **fewer pizzas** than we need)

few and little without a noun.

Few and Little are not very common without a noun. We use them in formal contexts:

- **Little** is known about his upbringing and education.
- **Few** would be in favour of police officers carrying weapons.