

Few, a few, little, a little

Introduction



We had **a few** meetings with them last month but made **little** progress.

Definition

Few, a few, little and **a little** are quantifiers which we use with **uncountable nouns** and plural **countable nouns**.

Construction

Examples	
'Few' and 'a few' for plural countable nouns	I have a few books. Few English people speak Japanese.
'Little' and 'a little' for uncountable nouns	I need a little information. There was little damage.

Uses

They are used to talk about small quantities and amounts.

We use **a few** and **a little** when the situation seems positive - we have enough.

We use **few** and **little** when the situation seems negative - we do not have enough.

For example, if someone has only 10 euros, this is enough to go to a bar for a drink but not enough to eat in a restaurant so:

"Shall we go for a drink after work?"

"Yes, why not? I have a little money left." [enough]

"Shall we eat out tonight? I'd like to try that new Italian restaurant."

"Sorry, I have little money at the moment. Can we wait till payday?" [not enough]

Similarly, these people have three friends at work:

He has few friends at work. [He works in a big company but most of his colleagues don't like him.]

She started working here just two weeks ago but she's already made a few friends. [She's popular with her new colleagues.]

In contrast, when a noun suggests something negative or unfavourable, we use a few and a little to talk about a situation that is bad and few and little when the situation is good:

Our computers are very old but we have few problems with them. [We can cope.]

There is little crime in this city. [It's not a big problem.]

In neutral situations, we use a few and a little:

I need to find the answers to a few questions before I can finish this report.

He likes a little sugar in his tea.

Few/little or not many/much

In conversation, we are more likely to use 'not much' or 'not many' than few or little.

He has few friends.

He has little money.

He doesn't have many friends.

He doesn't have much money.

Few people like spiders.

Little furniture is hand-made.

Not many people like spiders.

Not much furniture is hand-made.

Without nouns

'Little' and 'a little' can be used without nouns:

Little can be achieved without teamwork.

I'd like to do **a little** to help.

Few and **a few** can be used with **elliptical nouns**:

Few were prepared for the economic crisis. [people/companies/governments]

"Any questions?" "Yes, I have **a few**."

Intensifier

We can use 'very' to emphasise a small quantity or amount. For example:

There are very **few** good restaurants in this town.

I have very **little** work to do today.

Examples



We have **few** female construction workers in our company. We're hoping this will change but we're getting **little** support from senior management.



"Is there any food left?"
"Yes, **a few** sausages and **a little** salad."
"Great!"



I only need to add **a few** olives and **a little** cheese and it'll be ready.



You'll find **a little** of the information you need in here.



They've interviewed lots of people but **few** of them have been suitable so far.



There was very **little** traffic this morning - unusual for a Monday.



Very **few** families have more than three children nowadays.



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