# 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.**<br>**Few English people speak Japanese.** |
| **'Little' and 'a little' for uncountable nouns** | **I need a little information.**<br>**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 doesn't have many friends.** |
| **He has little money.** | **He doesn't have much money.** |
| **Few people like spiders.** | **Not many people like spiders.** |
| **Little furniture is hand-made.** | **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.**



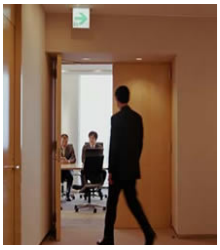
**"Is there any food left?"**
**"Yes, a few sausages and a little salad."**
**"Great!"**



**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.**



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



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

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