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 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.



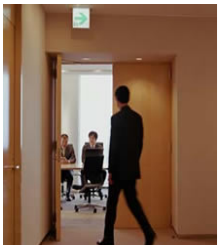
"Is there any food left?"
"Yes, a few sausages and a little salad."
"Great!"



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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