

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.



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



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



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