

Prepare for {IELTS}

Video Lessons



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# GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

**Few and little**

**THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN  
FEW AND LITTLE**

# EXPLANATION

- Candidates in the IELTS Test make lots of mistakes with **few** and **little**.
- Using these words correctly in your IELTS Speaking and Writing Tests can impress the IELTS examiner.
- Using these words correctly shows that you understand the difference between **COUNTABLE NOUNS** and **UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS**.

# USING FEW

We use **few** with plural countable nouns to refer to a small number:

- **Few** politicians seem to understand what life is like for ordinary people. (We could also write **Not many politicians ...; Only a small number of politicians...; Only a handful of politicians...**)
- There are **few** opportunities for young adults. Those who want to find well-paid jobs need to move to other parts of the country. (We could also write **There are not many opportunities...**)
- **Few** mathematicians can claim to have had a greater impact than Gauss. (We could also write **Not many mathematicians...**)

# USING **LITTLE**

We use **little** with uncountable nouns to refer to a small amount:

- Scientists believe that there is **little chance** that humans will set foot on Mars within the next few decades. (We could also write **There is not much chance...**)
- There is **little doubt** that, unless we make radical changes to the way we live, climate change will have a massive impact on future generations. (We could also write **There is not much doubt...**)
- There is **little evidence** to support the belief that life forms exist on other planets. However, despite the lack of proof, many scientists continue to think it very likely that we are not alone in the universe. (We could also write **There is not much evidence...**)

# USING LITTLE

**Little** can be used as an adjective. It means **small**:

- You need to clearly understand the difference between these **little words**.
- **Little/Small people** often claim that they are discriminated against and have few opportunities. (**Little people** are people who are small or not tall).
- Pilots need to concentrate fully. It would only take a **little/tiny mistake** to cause a disastrous plane crash.
- I would love to come on Saturday but I have a **little problem**! There isn't anybody who can look after Nico and Sam so I would have to bring them.

# USING **LITTLE**

If you have understood this, you will see that the following sentences are both correct, but that they have different meanings:

- **Little** children need to be brought up in a supportive and caring environment. (This sentence is about **small children**)
- Unfortunately, **few** children living in areas of war and armed conflict can be brought up in a supportive and caring environment. (This sentence is about **not many children**)

# COMPARATIVE FORMS WITH FEW

The comparative and superlative forms of **few** are **fewer** and **the fewest**:

- **Fewer** cars were sold in 1980 than in any of the ten previous years.
- It is claimed that our society is sexist because there are **fewer females** than males in positions of power and responsibility.
- Last year had **the fewest rainy days** since 1922. (We could write **Last year saw the lowest number of rainy days...**)
- According to the figures, Estonia has **the fewest migrants** of all the countries referred to in the statistics. (We could write **Estonia has the lowest number of migrants...**)



# COMPARATIVE FORMS WITH LESS

The comparative and superlative forms of **little** are **less** and **the least**:

- Many of us complain that we have **less time** for ourselves than we used to have.
- Most employees would like **less work** and more money.
- The city with **the least rain** last year was Arica. (We could write **Arica saw/had less rain last year than any other city**)
- Of all the candidates, I expected that you would have **the least difficulty** in passing the test. (We could write **I expected that you would have less difficulty than anybody else**)

# COMPARATIVE FORMS WITH LESS

We often use **less** and **the least** to compare longer adjectives. These words can be the opposite of **more** and **the most**:

- Although travelling around the world by plane would be lots of fun, it would be **less expensive** to use trains and ships.
- For many workers, the amount they are paid is **less important** than having a feeling of job satisfaction.
- **The least affluent** members of society should be supported.
- I'm sorry to say that my city is probably **the least attractive** place in the country. I wouldn't recommend visiting!

We don't usually use **less** with shorter adjectives like **big, small, wide, tall, short, sad, old, young, new**



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# GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

## Few and little

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN  
FEW/LITTLE AND A FEW / A  
LITTLE

# EXPLANATION

- Candidates in the IELTS Test make lots of mistakes with **few** and **a few**, and with **little** and **a little**.
- Examiners often see these words used incorrectly, so using them correctly in you IELTS Speaking and Writing Tests can impress the IELTS examiner.

# USING A FEW

It is important to understand the difference between **few** and **a few**. **A few** often means **not many but enough; a small but significant number**:

- There are **a few people** I can trust. ( = some)
- There are **a few reasons** why I would never consider living in a major city. ( = several; enough; not just one or two; a significant number)
- **A few students** get expelled from schools each year. ( = several; some; a small but significant number)
- Although I've been to **a few Asian countries**, I would love to travel more widely in the continent. ( = several; some; a small but significant number)
- **A few friends** came round for dinner last night. ( = several; some; a small but significant number)

# USING A LITTLE

It is important to understand the difference between **little** and **a little**. **A little** often means **some; possibly enough; a small but significant amount**:

- We need to treat the elderly with **a little consideration** and give them **a little help**. ( = some; a small but significant amount; enough)
- We will need **a little time** at the airport to check our bags in. ( = a small but significant amount; some)
- There is **a little truth** in the saying that wealth cannot make you happy. ( = a small but significant amount)
- When I was young, it was impossible to find out what was happening in the rest of the world. Nowadays, you can get **a little information** online. ( = a small but significant amount)



# USING A LITTLE

We can also use **a little (bit)** before adjectives to mean **a small amount; slightly**:

- It is **a little (bit) difficult** to understand why anyone would want to live in a noisy, dirty city.
- It seems **a little (bit) unfair** to ask young children to take formal mathematics tests at school.
- Although I expect I will be **a little (bit) tired** when I get there, I would love to meet you for a meal.
- I am **a little (bit) worried** about my studies. I'm finding it hard to get all my work done.



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## PREPARE for IELTS: Grammar Exercises

Look at the following sentences. Decide if it is better to use **few** or **a few**:

1. **Few/A few** people have stood on the surface of the moon.
2. **Few/A few** people came into the shop this morning. I wouldn't say it was incredibly busy but we managed to sell fifteen or twenty books.
3. There are **few/a few** things more beautiful than s sunset over the ocean. It is one of the most wonderful things you can see.
4. **Few/A few** people still live in the village. The vast majority have moved to the city.
5. **Few/A few** people came to the party. I suppose there might have been twenty people there by midnight. Actually, I'm quite glad more people didn't come.
6. **Few/A few** people came to the conference. It was very disappointing. I suppose numbers were probably so low because we held it in the middle of summer when many people were away on holiday.

### ANSWERS

1. **Few** people have stood on the surface of the moon.
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## PREPARE for IELTS: Grammar Exercises

Look at the following sentences. Decide if it is better to use **little** or **a little**:

1. There is **little/a little** hope. I don't believe that anything can be done to save the situation.
2. **Little/A little** is known about the people who lived on the island fifteen hundred years ago. There is a great deal of mystery surrounding them.
3. I managed to spend **little/a little** time walking around the city. It would have been nice to have a few more hours but I managed to see most of the famous sights.
4. There is **little/a little** point in going to the class. The lecturer just reads her notes and you can get a copy of them online. You might as well stay at home.
5. There is **little/a little** difference between these two words. If you can understand it, your English will be better.
6. We've still got **little/a little** money. We can't afford to eat in a fancy restaurant but we should be able to get ourselves a couple of pizzas.

### ANSWERS

1. There is **little** hope. I don't believe that anything can be done to save the situation.
2. **Little** is known about the people who lived on the island fifteen hundred years ago. There is a great deal of mystery surrounding them.
3. I managed to spend **a little** time walking around the city. It would have been nice to have a few more hours but I managed to see most of the famous sights.
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