

A few vs a little

CEFR A1-A2 · 20 questions · A4 / US Letter

A few counts things you can number. A little measures what you cannot, and both mean enough.

The rule

The countable and uncountable test

- Countable nouns can take a number: one ticket, two tickets. They have a plural form.
- Uncountable nouns cannot take a number: water, rice, advice, information, money. They have no plural.
- A few goes with countable plurals: a few tickets, a few questions, a few days.
- A little goes with uncountable nouns: a little water, a little help, a little time.

The meaning is positive: small but enough

- "A few" means a small number, and usually enough for the situation: "We have a few minutes, so let us have a coffee."
- "A little" means a small amount, and usually enough: "There is a little milk, so we can have tea."
- The phrase is good news. The speaker is not complaining about the size.
- Compare the twins without a: few and little mean "not enough" and carry a complaint. That is the next lesson.

Where the phrases sit in a sentence

- Before a noun: a few friends, a little sugar.
- Alone, when the noun is already known: "Would you like some biscuits?" "Yes, a few, thank you."
- With only: "only a few people came" means the number was small, and the feeling may be neutral or disappointed.
- With quite: "quite a few people came" means a surprisingly large number. Quite a little is much rarer.

Questions and negatives

- In questions, a few and a little suggest the answer is probably yes: "Would you like a little cake?"
- In negatives, they still work: "I have not had a little luck" is unusual; the natural negative uses any: "I have not had any luck."
- For a negative amount, use much or many: "not much time", "not many tickets".
- A few and a little are positive or neutral. The negative twins few and little do the complaining.

Common nouns for each

- With a few: people, friends, questions, tickets, days, minutes, books, mistakes.
- With a little: water, milk, sugar, salt, time, money, advice, help, luck, noise.

- Some nouns can be both, with a change of meaning: "a few hairs" (threads) and "a little hair" (a mass).
- When in doubt, try to put a number in front. If one, two, three works, use a few.

Questions

Write your answer on the line under each question. Check your work with the answer key on the last page.

1. I have ___ friends in Berlin.

2. There is ___ milk in the fridge.

3. We need ___ eggs for the cake.

4. She has ___ patience with this class.

5. ___ people were waiting at the bus stop.

6. Can I have ___ sugar in my coffee?

7. He speaks ___ Spanish.

8. We have ___ minutes before the train.

9. There is ___ cheese left.

10. I know ___ good restaurants here.

11. She gave me ___ advice about the trip.

12. ___ students passed with full marks.

13. Add ___ salt to the soup.

14. I will be away for ___ days.

15. There was ___ noise outside.

16. He made ___ mistakes in the essay.

17. I have ___ time this afternoon.

18. ___ tickets are still available.

19. We had ___ rain last night.

20. She bought ___ new dresses.

Answer key

A few vs a little · CEFR A1-A2

1. **a few** — Friends is a countable plural, so a few is correct.
2. **a little** — Milk is uncountable, so the small amount takes a little.
3. **a few** — Eggs is a countable plural, so a few fits.
4. **a little** — Patience is uncountable, so the phrase is a little.
5. **A few** — People is a countable plural, and a few starts the sentence.
6. **a little** — Sugar is uncountable, so a little is correct, even in this polite request.
7. **a little** — A language treated as an amount takes a little: a little Spanish.
8. **a few** — Minutes is a countable plural, so a few is correct.
9. **a little** — Cheese is uncountable, so the remaining amount takes a little.
10. **a few** — Restaurants is a countable plural, so a few fits.
11. **a little** — Advice is uncountable in English, so it takes a little.
12. **A few** — Students is a countable plural, so a few begins the sentence.
13. **a little** — Salt is uncountable, so a little is correct.
14. **a few** — Days is a countable plural, so a few fits.
15. **a little** — Noise is uncountable, so the small amount takes a little.
16. **a few** — Mistakes is a countable plural, so a few is correct.
17. **a little** — Time is uncountable, so the small amount takes a little.
18. **A few** — Tickets is a countable plural, so a few begins the sentence.
19. **a little** — Rain is uncountable, so a little is correct.
20. **a few** — Dresses is a countable plural, so a few fits.