Grammar Worksheets:  Less vs. Fewer

<http://www.grammar-worksheets.com>

Confusing the words fewer and less is a common error in student writing. The most common error occurs when students use less when they should use fewer.

**Wrong:** The Korea initiative creates less jobs for Asian workers than the Beijing Project.

**Problem:** The word jobs is countable. We can count the jobs that are created. In the language of linguistics, the word fewer is used with “count nouns” (nouns we can count), while the word less is used with “non-count nouns” (nouns we cannot count).

**Correct:** The Korea initiative creates fewer jobs for Asian workers than the Beijing Project.

**Rule:** Use the word less only with “non-count nouns.” Use the word fewer with “count nouns.”

**Non-count** nouns may be **physical nouns** that cannot be counted or **abstract nouns**.

**Physical Nouns (Non-count)**: The following is a list of physical nouns that cannot be counted. The list is not exhaustive.

advice

air

aluminum

applause

Arabic

baseball

beer

biology

boating

cake

cheese

cloth

Creole

cricket

dancing

dust

economics

electricity

English

equipment

experience

flour

French

furniture

geography

glass

glue

hair

harm

heat

history

hockey

homework

ice

leather

luggage

math

meat

metal

milk

oxygen

Papiamento

photography

plastic

poetry

porcelain

publicity

reading

rice

rugby

sand

smoking

soccer

Spanish

steel

sugar

sunshine

traffic

Urdu

water

weather

wheat

wine

wood

wool

**Abstract Nouns(Non-count):** The following is a list of abstract nouns. Again, the list is not exhaustive.

ambiguity

belligerence

courage

dexterity

emotion

ego

fecundity

friendship

graciousness

hope

honesty

infatuation

irreverence

jealousy

joy

liberty

loyalty

maturity

negativity

omen

peace

pride

romance

sadness

success

tenacity

truth

will

**Use the Word less With Non-count Nouns**

**Correct:** Animals consume less water in the desert than they do in a rain forest.

Physical nouns that cannot be counted can be made “countable” by including some unit of measure.

**Wrong:** Animals consume less liters of water in the desert than they do in a rain forest.

**Correct:** Animals consume fewer liters of water in the desert than they do in a rain forest.

We cannot count “water”; however, we can count “liters of water.” Thus the correct forms are “less water” and “fewer liters of water.”

**Abstract nouns** cannot ever be made “countable” except in a figurative sense, as in “The coward does not have an ounce of courage.”

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1. There are less markers in the cabinet today than yesterday.

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2. Chefs use less kilograms of flour making pastries than making bread.

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3. Less automobiles cross the bridge at night than in the afternoon.

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4. Energy-efficient appliances consume less electricity than older appliances.

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5. Energy-efficient appliances consume less kilowatts of electricity than older appliances.

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6. Janice exhibits less emotional outbursts than Alicia.

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7. Modern buildings use much less steel beams than older buildings.

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8. This spring, I plan to spend less Euros travelling than I did last year.

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9. People spend less days vacationing than they did in the past.

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10. Peter has lost less weight than John because he does not eat less candy bars at snack time.

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11. When Ali moved to Brisbane, he packed less bags than his sister.

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12. The winery shipped less barrels of wine this year.

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13. Chinese food uses less grams of cheese per serving than Mexican food.

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14. Florida ships less tons of sugar today than it did last decade.

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