

Grammar Worksheets: Less vs. Fewer

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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	cloth	French	ice	poetry	sugar
air	Creole	furniture	leather	porcelain	sunshine
aluminum	cricket	geography	luggage	publicity	traffic
applause	dancing	glass	math	reading	Urdu
Arabic	dust	glue	meat	rice	water
baseball	economics	hair	metal	rugby	weather
beer	electricity	harm	milk	sand	wheat
biology	English	heat	oxygen	smoking	wine
boating	equipment	history	Papiamento	soccer	wood
cake	experience	hockey	photography	Spanish	wool
cheese	flour	homework	plastic	steel	

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

ambiguity	friendship	joy	pride
belligerence	graciousness	liberty	romance
courage	hope	loyalty	sadness
dexterity	honesty	maturity	success
emotion	infatuation	negativity	tenacity
ego	irreverence	omen	truth
fecundity	jealousy	peace	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."

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

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

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

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

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

6. Janice exhibits less emotional outbursts than Alicia.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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