

# Quantifiers

## 166 Large and small quantities

### A What is a quantifier?

A quantifier is a word like *many*, *no*, or *some*. It usually comes before a noun.  
*many times no tickets some water*  
A quantifier says how many or how much. For example, *many* expresses a large quantity, and *no* expresses zero quantity. Which quantifier we use can also depend on whether a noun is countable or uncountable. For example, we say *many bills* but *much money*. For details about the possible combinations, > 137B.

A quantifier can consist of more than one word, e.g. *lots of*, *a few*.  
*lots of fun a few people*

We can also use a phrase with *number* or *amount*.  
*a number of problems no amount of effort*

We often use an adjective with *number* or *amount*, e.g. *small*, *enormous*.  
*a small number of cases an enormous amount of work*

Sometimes we can use an adverb of degree (e.g. *too*, *quite*) with a quantifier.  
*too many e-mails quite a lot of money*  
For the possible combinations, > 196F.

We can use a quantifier without a noun when the meaning is clear from the context. > 174  
*I expected to see lots of people, but there were only a few.*

In B-E there are some examples of how to express large and small quantities. Some of these forms are dealt with in more detail in 167-174.

### B A large quantity

With either a plural or an uncountable noun.  
*There are a lot of/lots of letters for you.* > 167A,B  
*There's masses/heaps/loads of time.* (informal)

Only with a plural noun.  
*Many questions remain unanswered.* > 167A,B  
*A large/considerable number of languages have died out completely.*  
*Numerous difficulties were put in my way.*

Only with an uncountable noun.  
*We haven't had much rain lately.* > 167A,B  
*A dishwasher uses a great deal of electricity.*  
*A large/considerable amount of data has been gathered.*

Adjectives we can use before *number* or *amount* include *considerable*, *enormous*, *fair*, *large*, *substantial*, and *tremendous*.

#### NOTE

The verb agrees with the noun. > 146B  
*A large number of languages have died out.*

### C A quantity

With either a plural or an uncountable noun.  
*I need to earn some money.* > 172A

Only with a plural noun  
*A number of problems have arisen.*

Only with an uncountable noun  
*The machine makes a certain amount of noise.*

### D A small quantity

Only with a plural noun  
*I'm having a few days off work.* > 176C-D  
*A small number of houses will be built.*  
*The group has only a handful of members.*  
*Several people were injured in the incident.* (perhaps four or five people)

Only with an uncountable noun  
*I'll just have a little water/a bit of water.* > 167C-D  
*A computer uses only a small amount of electricity.*

### E Zero quantity

*There's no milk in the fridge.* > 172C  
*I haven't sent any e-mails today.* > 172A

## 167 A lot of, many, much, a few, a little, and a bit of

### A A lot of, lots of, many, and much

These words express a large quantity. We use *a lot of* and *lots of* with both plural and uncountable nouns.

Plural: *The town gets a lot of visitors/lots of visitors in summer.*  
Uncountable: *You'll have a lot of fun/lots of fun at our Holiday Centre.*

*Many* goes before a plural noun and *much* before an uncountable noun.  
Plural: *There aren't many trains on a Sunday.*  
Uncountable: *There isn't much traffic on a Sunday.*

We can use *quite* and *rather* before *a lot of* (but not before *lots of*, *many*, or *much*).  
*We get quite a lot of visitors.*

I.

### B A lot of, lots of, many, and much in statements and questions

As a very general rule, we use *a lot of/lots of* in positive statements and *many* or *much* in negatives and questions.

Positive: *We get a lot of visitors/lots of visitors.*

Negative: *We don't get many visitors.*

Question: *Do you get many visitors? How many visitors do you get?*

However, there are exceptions to this general rule. In positive statements we use *many* or *much* (but not *a lot of/lots of*) after *very*, *so*, *too*, *as*, and *how*.  
*Very many crimes go unreported.*

*I've got so many books there's no room for any more.*

*There's too much concrete around here and not enough grass.*

*I haven't taken as many photos this year.*

*I know how much work you've put into the project.*

*A lot of* and *lots of* are rather more informal than *many/much*. In informal English we can use *a lot of* in negatives and questions as well as in positive statements.

*We don't get a lot of visitors / many visitors.*

*Have you done a lot of work / much work on the project?*

Mainly in more formal English, we can use *many* and *much* in positive statements as well as in negatives and questions.

*Many voices spoke out in protest.*

*There has been much criticism of the government's policy.*

#### NOTE

We can use *not many / not much / not a lot of* + noun as subject or after a preposition.  
*Not many shops were open. We arrived with not a lot of time to spare.*

### C A few, a little, and a bit of

These words mean a small quantity. We use them mainly in positive statements. *A few* goes before a plural noun; *a little* and *a bit of* go before an uncountable noun.

Plural: *I took a few photos of the animals.*

Uncountable: *I've still got a little money/a bit of money left, fortunately.*

We often use *a few* in expressions of time.

*I saw Lucy a few days ago.*

*A (little) bit of* means the same as *a little* but is more informal.

*I'm just going to add a (little) bit of salt.*

We can use *quite* before *a few* and *a bit of*.

*I took quite a few photos. We've had quite a bit of rain.*

This means a fairly large quantity, similar to *quite a lot of photos/rain*.

Only emphasizes the smallness of the number.

*I only took a few photos.*

This means a smaller number than we might expect.

#### NOTE

*Little* can also be an adjective meaning 'small in size', e.g. *a little flat / a small flat*.

### D Few and little

*Few* and *little* without *a* have a negative meaning. Compare these examples.

*Do people come here on holiday? ~ Yes, there are a few tourists.*

(= some tourists/a small number of tourists)

*Do people come here on holiday? ~ No, there are few tourists.*

(= not many tourists)

*Even at three in the morning there was a little traffic.*

(= some traffic/a small amount of traffic)

*It was three in the morning, so there was little traffic.*

(= not much traffic)

*Few* and *little* used alone without *a* are rather formal. In conversation *not many* and *not much* are more usual.

We can use *very* before *few* or *little*.

*There are very few tourists here.*

(= a very small number of tourists)

### E Special patterns with many, few, and little

*Many*, *few*, and *little* sometimes come after a determiner, e.g. *his*, *the*, *these*.

*Tim introduced us to one of his many girlfriends.*

*The few hotels in the area are always full.*

*Only these few survivors are left to tell the story.*

*I didn't want to waste the little money I had left.*

*A great many* is a little formal.

*A great many crimes go unreported.*

#### NOTE

a This pattern with *many a* is rather literary.

*Many a ship has come to grief off the coast here.*

*Many a time I have dreamed of starting a new life.*

In informal speech *many times* or *lots of times* would be more usual.

b *Many* and *few* can be a complement.

*The disadvantages of the scheme are many.*

This is rather literary. *Many* before the noun would be more usual.

*The scheme has many disadvantages.*

## 168 Whole and part quantities

### A Introduction

To talk about whole and part quantities, we can use words like *all* and *most*.

*The story is in all (of) the newspapers.* (the whole group)

*The bed takes up most of the space in here.* (the greater part)

We often use *of* with whole and part quantities.

Some quantifiers can express either large/small quantities or whole/part quantities. They include *a lot of*, *much*, *many*, *a few*, and *a little*.