



Unit 36 – Few, Little, Less, Fewer, At Least (*We've got a little time.. We have little time..*)

A) **A little** and **a few** are quantifiers that basically mean **some**. **Little** and **few** convey a negative meaning. They indicate 'not as much as expected or hoped for'. Compare the following examples:

i)	a few	-> He packed a few things into his bag.	-> some, a small number
ii)	few	-> Few employees had received proper training.	-> not many/almost none
iii)	a little	-> Can you stay a little longer at the event?	-> some/a small amount
iv)	little	-> Ms. Smith gave little time to complete the test.	-> not much/almost nothing

A little / A few with a noun – **Singular countable nouns** take a little. **Plural countable nouns** take a few:

-> There's **a little soup** leftover in the pot. -> There are only **a few minutes** left in the game.

Little / Few with a noun – **Uncountable nouns** use little and **plural countable nouns** take few:

-> Mr. Smith shows **little patience** during meetings. -> We were left with **few options** over what to do.

A little / A few as pronouns – we can substitute a noun with **a little** or **a few** when the context is clear:

-> Mary told us **a little** about her past in Slovenia. -> We don't have many snacks left, just **a few**.

Note: -> 'little' and 'few' aren't usually used as pronouns: -> **Little** is understood.. -> **Much** is known..

(A) little of / (A) few of – can be used before **articles** (a/an, the), **demonstratives** (that, those), **possessives** (my, her) or **pronouns** (you, them):

-> Mom: Mix the flour with **a little of the** milk. Dad: **A little of that** milk?
-> Mom: Yes and you can use **a few of my** cups. Dad: Okay, I'll use **a few of them**.

A little as an adverb – a little can be used as an **adverb of degree** when referring to verbs and actions:

-> It was cloudy but the weather warmed up **a little** after lunch. *or*: '...warmed up **a bit**.'

A little with adjectives & adverbs – used to modify adjectives & adverbs and can also be substituted with **a bit**:

-> The movie got **a little more interesting** at the end. -> Mom seemed to feel **a bit better** today.

Little with an adjective – used to describe the size or amount of a noun:

-> There's **a little temple** up ahead on the trail. -> We had **a little snack** after the movie.

Note: -> **Little and small** can both be used to indicate size. However, only **little** can also express a positive emotion:

-> The shirt is too **little / small** for him. (size) -> There is a *wonderful/lovely/quaint* **little** café here.

B) Less or fewer – **Less** is the comparative form of **little** and **fewer** is the comparative form of **few**. They are **quantifiers** and are used to talk about **quantities, amounts and degree**.

More / less and fewer with a noun – **Less** is used with uncountable nouns while we use **fewer** with plural nouns:

-> I do **less work** now to spend **more time** with family. In the future, we'll see **fewer accidents**.

Tip: -> we often use *less* with plural countable nouns (less cups, less bags, etc.) although *fewer* is actually correct.

More / Less / fewer with **of** – *of* must be used with fewer or less before articles (a/an, the), demonstratives (this), possessives (my, his) or pronouns (him, them). **Less of** is used with singular nouns and **fewer of** with plural nouns:

-> Flying is **less of a risk** than driving. **Fewer of those clients** will complain as much in the future.

'More or less' – used between the subject and main verb, or after the modal verb or first auxiliary verb, or after **be** as a main verb. More or less means **mostly, nearly, about, or approximately**. It is used in informal communication:

-> The project was **more or less** a success. It's okay to leave; the meeting is **more or less** over.

C) The least / At least – (The) Least is the superlative of little. It is used with quantities, amounts, and degree:

i) with a noun – Tom did **the least work** while Ann did **the most**.

ii) with an adjective – I seemed to be **the least excited** out of everyone.

iii) after a verb – Ted **played the least** in the game but seemed to be fine with it. -> '*played less than the others*'

At (the very) least – used to indicate a minimum number or amount, or 'no less than':

-> That BMW would cost **at least** \$50,000. A: How many deer did you see? B: I'd say **at least 12**.



At least is used in a variety of contexts:

- i) to express the minimum of what we expect to happen (usually when we feel annoyed about something):
-> You could have **at least called** to say you'd be late. I've been waiting here for an hour!
- ii) to rephrase or clarify something we have said, to ensure that it is clear:
-> Amy's on vacation today and isn't coming. **At least**, I don't think she is.
- iii) to express something positive or better in a situation that seems negative (usually after 'but'):
-> The house needed a lot of renovations, but **at least** the kitchen was finished.

Unit 36 – Exercises:

36.1 – Complete the sentences with **few** or **a few**. (36-A)

1. We just have _____ more tasks left to do before we finish up for the day.
2. Do you mind getting _____ cartons of milk at the supermarket on your way home?
3. Unfortunately, _____ children avoid making unhealthy choices about what they eat between meals.
4. _____ people actually went to see that movie. Personally, I thought it was excellent!
5. I really need to see Mr. Vickers today. I've got _____ more questions before we write our math exam.

36.2 – Complete the sentences with **little** or **a little**. (36-A)

1. My son sometimes asks for _____ extra money when I drop him off at school in the mornings.
2. I've got _____ money left in my bank account until payday. I'll have to pay for this with cash today.
3. If the sauce seems a bit too thick, add _____ more olive oil and lemon juice.
4. It's been such a dry summer so far. I know farmers would really appreciate _____ rain for their crops.
5. The natives used to call this the land of open spaces, _____ water, and abundant deer.

36.3 – Complete the sentences with **few**, **a few**, **little**, or **a little**. (36-A)

1. Warm up _____ milk for the baby please. It's time to feed her.
2. Despite high expectations at the movie premiere, _____ critics actually gave it a positive review.
3. Most of the children have completed the test. There are only _____ of them still writing.
4. The diplomat spoke _____ English, but did have a translator with him so that we could communicate.

36.4 – Write **a few** / **few** / **fewer** / **a little** / **little** / **less** + a word from the box in each sentence below. (36-A/B)

time / paint / money / days / time / repairs / mistakes

1. Would you like to have a coffee? We have **a little time** now before the meeting starts.
2. Compared to her friends, she spends _____ on shopping and eating out.
3. We still have _____ left to finish the report. If we hurry, I think we can submit before the deadline.
4. Fortunately, there were _____ needed on the house than the real estate agent had told us.
5. We have _____ before the conference starts. Let's hurry up or we're going to be late!
6. My exam grades were pretty good. I made _____ and actually got over 90 in every one!
7. We've still got _____ left. Let's try to complete this wall before we finish for the day.

36.5 – Complete the sentences with **the least** or **at least**. (36-C)

1. During the interview, they determined which applicant could complete the tasks with _____ effort.
2. We found out later that the person who spoke _____ at the meeting was actually the company CEO.
3. She was suddenly fired from her position last week. The company could've _____ given her a warning.
4. Be sure to marinate the chicken for _____ eight hours before putting it in the oven.
5. Whether you are accepted or not, _____ you know that you were prepared and gained experience.
6. Sam seemed to be _____ disappointed with the loss, despite the dramatic final moments of the game.
7. Don't worry, Mike submitted his part of the assignment on time last night. _____, I think he did.