



**BLOOMSBURY** INTERNATIONAL

# Loanwords and Less vs Fewer

Learn about borrowed words and the difference  
between “less” and “fewer”



# Less vs Fewer



In our extensive experience at Bloomsbury International we have noticed that one of our students' biggest difficulties is when to choose **less** or **fewer**!

So here are some helpful tips to help you along the way:

## 1. **Countable vs uncountable**

There is a very simple rule of thumb: we use both fewer and less in comparative sentences but **fewer** with *countable* nouns and **less** with *uncountable* nouns

- Lorna knows **fewer** celebrities than Fay (countable)
- Aidarous eats **less** chocolate than Warren. (uncountable)



This is supported by the idea that

- Fewer= Not as many (as) è → Lorna knows not as many celebrities as Fay (countable)
- Less = not as much (as) è → Aidarous eats not as much chocolate as Warren. (uncountable)

But what about:

- Simon writes to ***fewer/less*** people on Facebook

This is one of the most common mistakes English students make.

Is **people** countable and uncountable?

Well the answer is (drum roll)..... it's an irregular countable noun: **person (singular)/ people (plural)**.

## 2. When less acts as a pronoun

- Olga eats ***less*** than Fay.

But what does Olga eats less of?

- Olga eats ***less*** (food) than Fay.

In this case, the noun ***Less*** refers to can be removed, but be careful: **This only applies to less, and not fewer**

Now, compare these two sentences, which one is correct?

1. Olga reads fewer books than Fay.
2. Olga reads fewer than Fay.
3. Olga reads less than Fay.

Both a) and c) are correct and b) is incorrect as **fewer** cannot stand on its own without a noun.

### 3. Fewer/less + of (before determiners)

**Less** and **fewer** are used with the preposition **of** before determiners (such as *the, my, this*) and pronouns.

- I wish Simon would spend **less of his** time playing computer games
- Do you still drink alcohol? No I drink **less of it**
- Are there a lot of pandas alive nowadays? No, there are **fewer of them**.



### 4. Less+ adj/adverb

**Less** is also used with adjectives and adverbs:

- Katie is **less** talkative than Xavier
- Xavier laughs **less** loudly than Katie.

### 5. Less and fewer with numbers and measurements

*Less* is also used with precise numbers such as distances, times, ages and money, despite the noun it refers to not being uncountable.

E.g.:

- Their engagement lasted **less** than 3 months. Not Their engagement lasted **fewer** than 3 months
- *It weighs **less** than 200 kilograms.*
- *Covent Garden is **less** than 1 mile away from Bloomsbury International.*
- *He earns **less** than £20 a day*

Fewer is use primarily with collective amounts of things.

- *There were **fewer** than 10 types of tree can be found in Bloomsbury Park*
- *There were **fewer** than 100 people at Hodan's party*



However, it is generally true that most people would adopt to use **less** rather than **fewer** when describing the above categories.

#### 6. **Strange but true**

As always, English throws a spanner in the works and causes us to doubt when to use fewer or less.

This sentence is a prime example:

- All these items in this store are £10 or **less**

# Loanwords



So far we have been lead to believe that we use less with uncountable nouns and fewer with countable ones, so it would be fair to say that as the quantifier refers to items (plural/countable noun) then the sentence is incorrect. But how many times have you seen this sentence in a supermarket. The debate continues....

English is a language that is always changing and is constantly adapting to the needs of its users. It might be surprising for some to find out that the Oxford dictionary adds approximately 1,000 new words to its pages every year, and these entries come from all different spheres of life, for example, social media (selfie), technological lexis (cyberthreat), products (smartwatch), borrowed words from other languages (bento box), to name but a few.

These words have become part and parcel of our language. Just take the words 'café' and 'croissant', for example. How often have you seen, said or heard these words recently? Probably dozens of times, however, many of us are unaware that they appear in the English dictionary as borrowed words.

Looking at recent statistics, we can see that the majority of borrowed words come from Latin (29%) and French (29%), followed by Germanic (26%) and then other languages (16%). Some are easy to identify, whilst others are a bit trickier.

Here are some interesting examples of loanwords.

**RSVP** – abbreviation for “répondez s’il vous plaît”, French for “please reply”; used at the end of a written invitation to mean that you should inform the people who invited you whether you are going to attend or not. E.g. RSVP by 20 March

**Gesundheit** – a German word sometimes used by British speakers to mean “bless you” and said after someone has sneezed.



**Schmooze** – a Yiddish word that means to talk in a friendly or intimate way about unimportant things at a social event, especially because you want to gain an advantage for yourself later.

*Example: I went to that networking event to schmooze with some potential clients.*

**Macho** – a Spanish adjective to describe a strong, tough, brave and muscular man.

*Example: I prefer shy guys. I don't like macho men.*

**Moped** – is a combination of 2 Swedish words: mo= motor and ped= pedaler. It generally means a small motorcycle with pedals.

*Example: He jumped on his moped and rode into the sunset*

**Paparazzi** from Italian, it is used in English to describe a photographer (paparazzo) or a group of photographers (paparazzi) who take pictures of celebrities to sell to newspapers and magazines.

*Example: I wouldn't like to be a celebrity with all those paparazzi following me all the time.*



# The European Day of Languages

This sharing of words is a clear sign that our language is constantly changing but it is also the result of the meeting of people and the sharing of information and experiences.

To honour this, the Council of Europe decided in 2001 to institute [The European Day of Languages](#), which this year was celebrated on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2017. On this day many schools and institutions are invited to participate in events to encourage language learning and understanding, promote the rich linguistic and cultural diversity of Europe, and to increase intercultural understanding.

- Check our [Idiom of the Week](#) every Wednesday to help broaden your knowledge of English expressions.
- Read our bi-weekly [blog](#) which includes study tips, interesting aspects of the English language, worldwide facts and much more!