

Quantifiers

Quantifiers are adjectives or adjectival phrases that describe “how much” (uncountable) or “how many” (countable)† of a given noun there is.

Types of Quantifiers

Some quantifiers can only go with countable (precise quantity) nouns, while others can only modify uncountable (imprecise quantity) nouns. A few quantifiers can modify both. Some examples are listed below, but more can be found at the links under “Resources” (below).

For use with uncountable nouns	For use with both types of nouns	For use with countable nouns
A little, little A bit of A great deal of A large amount of Much	No, none Some (of) Any A lot Lots of Plenty of Enough	A few, few A number of Numerous Several Many (numbers)*

Examples

- The city had *a large amount of* traffic due to road construction.
- Not *much* rain in the spring meant that the crops suffered in the summer.

*Aside about Numbers

Numbers (one, two, etc.) are different than quantifiers: quantifiers are more general in description, while numbers indicate precise quantities. However, quantifiers and numbers can be used in the same way:

The experiments were repeated *a few* times in order to ensure accuracy. **vs.** The experiments were repeated *three* times in order to ensure accuracy.

The quantifier “*a few*” describes the noun “times” in a general sense. If you wanted to do the same procedure as the author, you would not know how many times you should run the experiment. **The “Methods” and/or the “Experimental” portion of a scientific manuscript should not use general quantifiers.**

Connotation/Attitudes of Quantifiers

A few and *few* (for countable) as well as *a little* and *little* (for uncountable nouns) may seem very similar, but they actually hold very different connotations. *A few* and *a little* indicate that the speaker feels **positively about the quantity** he/she is describing: though he/she may not have much, it is enough. *Few* and *little* indicates the speaker feels **negatively about the quantity**: he/she is lacking in the noun and would like more if it were available.

Examples

- I have *a little money* for lunch. ⇒ I have *enough money* for lunch.
- I have *little money* for lunch. ⇒ I *do not have enough money* for lunch.
- The scientist has *a few techniques* which she can use to determine his product. ⇒ The scientist has *enough techniques* which she can use to determine his product.
- The scientist has *few techniques* which she can use to determine his product. ⇒ The scientist *does not have enough techniques* which she can she use to determine his product.

Quantifiers followed by “of”

Many quantifiers that end in “of” must be followed by an article or determiner (these, his, my, etc.), although some do not. Unfortunately, no exact rule determines which quantifiers require an article after “of.” A few examples are listed below.

Must be followed by article or determiner	May or may not be followed by article or determiner
All of Some of Many of Much of (A) few of (A) little of None of Several of Enough of	Plenty of A lot of A number of A couple of

Examples

- *Many of the doctors* believed *much of his research* was flawed.
- *None of the tourists* knew that *a lot of piranha species* prefer to eat crackers over meat OR *None of the tourists* knew that *a lot of the piranha species* prefer to eat crackers over meat.

Practice

Choose the quantifier(s) which make(s) the sentence grammatically correct:

1. The tea was too sweet because she had put too [much | many] sugar.
2. [Much | Lots of | Several] soil samples were taken from archaeological dig site.
3. [A large amount of | Plenty of | A large number of] fish inhabit the Great Barrier Reef.

Choose if the quantifier should be positive or negative based on the rest of the sentence:

1. [A few | Few] friends visited him at the hospital, which seemed to raise his spirits.
2. The stock plummeted in price at closing, so in the end there was [a little | little] profit.
3. She was busy with classes, so she had [a little | little] time for tennis.

Determine if an article or determiner is necessary:

1. A number of ____ actors complained to the director about the lighting.
2. Enough of ____ students complained to the professor about the noisy room that all of ____ class was able to have lecture outside.
3. All of ____ friends found that while she had a lot of ____ books, she preferred to read only one or two repeatedly.

Sources and Further Reading/Practice:

<http://linguapress.com/grammar/quantifiers.htm>

<http://www.edufind.com/english-grammar/quantifiers/>

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/determiners/determiners.htm>

More practice: <http://www.grammarbank.com/quantifiers.html>

More practice: <http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/english-grammar/determiners-and-quantifiers/quantifiers>

†For more information on countable and uncountable nouns, Yale GWL offers a separate tutorial on the topic.