**‘Less’ or ‘Fewer’?**

Using the word ‘less’ in place of ‘fewer’ is a common mistake.

**Less** means ‘not as much’. It should be used when talking about something that is **not easily** counted or measured.

**🗸“I would like less milk in my coffee.”

*We can’t easily measure the milk.*

🗸 “Less chat, more work!”

*It’s difficult to measure how much somebody talks.*

🗸 “I drink less water when I’m busy.”

*The water isn’t countable (although the bottles are - we could say* ***fewer bottles*** *of water).*

**Fewer** means ‘**not as** **many’**. It should be used for items that **can** **easily** be counted one-by-one.

🗸**Fewer** students attended Football due to the weather.

*We can easily count the students.*

🗸There are **fewer** detentions given on Fridays.

*We can easily count the detentions.*

🗸There are **fewer** cars in the car park in summer.

*We can easily count the cars in summer and winter.*

**Exception to the Rule:**

For numbers with **time, money or distance**, you should use **less**, not fewer.

For example: There are less than five minutes remaining.

**Summary**

Easily countable = Fewer. There were fewer apples in the canteen today.

Not easy to count / vague = Less. There was less rain last night.

Time, distance or specific amounts of money = Less. Year 11 have less than three days left.

**Complete the following sentences with less or fewer:**

**Tip: Is it *easily* counted?**

1. I’ve been eating \_\_\_\_\_ chocolate bars since the Health Assembly.
2. There are \_\_\_\_\_ rules in that school.
3. He takes \_\_\_\_\_ care over his appearance on Saturdays.
4. You get \_\_\_\_\_ lives on Level 5 of this game.
5. There will be \_\_\_\_\_ students once Year 11 leave.
6. It is illegal to earn \_\_\_\_\_ than £6.31 per hour.
7. John had \_\_\_\_\_ mistakes in this week’s test.
8. 10 items or \_\_\_ at this till.\*
9. We have Sports Day in \_\_\_\_\_ than ten weeks.
10. There is \_\_\_\_ cold air in that classroom now.

**Answers**

**1. Fewer 2. Fewer 3. Less 4.Fewer 5. Fewer 6. Less (specific amount of money) 7. Fewer 8. Fewer\* 9. Less (refers to time) 10. Less.**

[](http://www.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://www.gcse.com/english/images/10less.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.gcse.com/english/less.htm&h=266&w=250&tbnid=ijbb7zsrYeMKEM:&zoom=1&q=tesco%20sign%2010%20items%20or%20less&docid=UY_sQ3bmrcBn6M&ei=lOVwU7TbC4LfOvitgbgD&tbm=isch&ved=0CFcQMygAMAA&iact=rc&uact=3&dur=679&page=1&start=0&ndsp=42)\*Number 8 was controversial. Tesco displayed a sign that was incorrect. It should read **‘10 Items or Fewer’** as the items are countable.

It has now been taken down thanks to the ‘Plain English Society’!

**Extension:** Create your own ‘less’ or fewer’ sentences, based on your hobby.