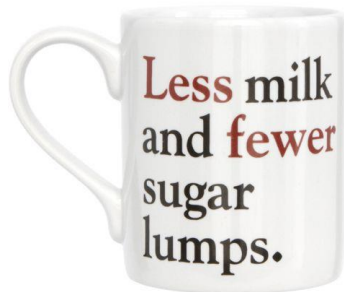


personal english



Grammar Tidbit #29 *Fewer or Less?*



We use the quantifiers *less* and *fewer* to talk about quantities, amounts and degrees. Both of them are comparatives: **less** is the comparative form of 'little' (with the meaning of 'insufficient', rather than of 'small'; used in the **singular form**), whereas **fewer** is the comparative form of 'few' (meaning 'insufficient' in the **plural form**).

Less is used with **singular or uncountable nouns**, **fewer** is used with **plural nouns**:

*I do **less work** at weekends than I used to.*

*Better cycle routes would mean **fewer cars** and **fewer accidents**.*

When we use *fewer* or *less* before articles (*a/an, the*), demonstratives (*this, that*), possessives (*my, your*) or pronouns (*him, them*), we need to use 'of'. We use '**less of**' with singular nouns and '**fewer of**' with plural nouns:

*It was funny to begin with, but as time went on, it became **less of a joke**.*

Less is also used with **numbers** when they are on their own and with **expressions of measurement or time**:

*His weight fell from 18 stone to **less than 12**.*

*Their marriage lasted **less than two years**.*

*Heath Square is **less than four miles** away from Dublin city center.*

We can leave out the noun when it is obvious:

*Every year in Britain about 5,000 people die on the roads. **Fewer** are killed at work. (fewer people)*

