

Misused Words: Fewer or Less

When dealing with a quantity that can be counted, use the word *fewer*.

I have *fewer* books than she does.
He has *fewer* apples than you do.

If a quantity cannot be counted, use *less*.

There is *less* sugar in this cup.
She has *less* water to drink.

In general, use fewer to modify plural nouns.

I promised to eat *fewer* pancakes at breakfast.

Exception: Use *less than* to modify plural nouns that indicate a measure of time, amount, or distance.

I leave in *less than* two weeks.
She had *less than* ten dollars in the bank.
He traveled *less than* six miles to get here.

Use *less* to modify singular nouns.

She promised to drink *less* coffee every day.

Activity

Use either *fewer* or *less* in the below sentences. Follow the rules outlined above to help you make your selections.

1. There are _____ apples than oranges in this fruit basket.
2. We'll take _____ time if we drive on the interstate.
3. I need _____ water when I stay out of the sun.
4. _____ students take public transportation during the summer.
5. You can use _____ kindling to start a campfire if you use lighter fluid.
6. She wrote _____ pages than the assignment specified.
7. It costs _____ money to travel during the off-season.
8. He needed to use _____ salt in the recipe to make it taste good.

Answer Key for Activity

1. fewer
2. less
3. less
4. fewer
5. less
6. fewer
7. less
8. less

References

“Chicago Style Q&A: Less or Fewer?” *The Chicago Manual of Style Online*. The University of Chicago. 22 January 2010.