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**