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Determiners and quantifiers

Part 1 · Choosing words for amounts





Grammar at a glance

When you want to...	Form to use	Worked example
Point to one or several	this cup / these cups	These cups belong on this shelf.
Choose a counting unit	paper / sheets of paper	We need two sheets of paper.
Ask, offer or give a choice	any / some / any one	Any cups left? Would you like some tea?
Ask about quantity	many + count / much + mass	How many cups? How much tea?

SELECT A ROW TO OPEN ITS LESSON

DETERMINERS AND QUANTIFIERS

Determiners inside complete noun groups

Five cups are on the desk. Lily selects one nearby cup, then three nearby cups. Another message identifies her own bag.

A determiner helps identify a noun or express its quantity. Match this and that with singular count nouns, these and those with plurals.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
One nearby item	Take this cup.	This identifies a singular nearby item in the stated scene.
Several nearby items	Take these cups.	These agrees with plural cups.
Possession	Take my bag.	My determines bag; do not add the before my in this noun group.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

All my cups is valid; the my cups is not the ordinary noun-group pattern.

Can no two determiner-like words ever occur together?

Some combinations are valid, including all my cups and these three cups. Learn their positions rather than treating every combination as an error.

YOUR TURN

Choose plural agreement.

that pots / those pots

> **Answer • those pots**
> Those matches plural pots.

DETERMINERS AND QUANTIFIERS

Countability depends on meaning

The stock record lists eight cups and 200 mL of water. It also lists information about delivery, not separate informations. A café order uses two coffees to mean two servings.

Countability depends on meaning. Paper can mean material, while a paper can mean a document.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Counted units	There are eight cups.	Cups are individual countable items.
Measured material	There is some water.	Water is uncountable in this material meaning; mL supplies a measurement unit.
A changed meaning	The café ordered two coffees.	Coffees here means servings, not an arbitrary plural of liquid material.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

A piece of equipment is one item; equipment remains uncountable in this meaning.

Is an uncountable noun impossible to measure?

No. Water is measured in mL and equipment can be counted through item phrases. Uncountable describes the noun's grammatical use in that meaning, not the absence of quantity.

YOUR TURN

Which phrase gives someone advice in standard English?

some advice / three advices

> Answer • some advice
> Advice is uncountable here.

DETERMINERS AND QUANTIFIERS

Statements, questions, offers and free choice

There are some cups ready. Lily asks whether there are any spare cups without assuming the answer. She offers a visitor some water and asks for some help, expecting a positive response. A separate rule allows a visitor to choose any cup from the clean set.

Some is common in offers and requests. Any often fits an open question, a negative statement or a free choice.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Open question	Are there any spare cups?	Any suits a neutral availability question.
Offer	Would you like some water?	Some is natural in this offer; questions do not all require any.
Free choice	Choose any clean cup.	Any permits each eligible choice, not an unlimited number of cups.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

Choose any clean cup leaves the identity open but still specifies a singular cup.

Can any only occur in negatives and questions?

No. It also supports affirmative free-choice uses such as choose any cup. Context determines its meaning.

YOUR TURN

Choose a natural way to offer tea.

Would you like a teas? / Would you like some tea?

> **Answer • Would you like some tea?**
> Offers commonly use some.

DETERMINERS AND QUANTIFIERS

Quantifiers and comparisons

The ledger shows eight cups and 200 mL of water. A second delivery brings fewer cups but less water than yesterday. In ordinary affirmative conversation a lot of is often more natural than much; the editor must distinguish grammatical possibility from style preference.

Use many with plural count nouns and much with uncountable amounts. More works with both.

USE	EXAMPLE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Count items	How many cups are there?	Many modifies plural count cups.
Measure material	How much water is there?	Much modifies mass water.
Compare quantities	Fewer cups, less water.	The usual edited count/mass contrast follows the noun meaning.

HOW THE PATTERN WORKS

We have a lot of water is natural conversation; much depends on style and construction.

Must every plural-looking expression use fewer?

No. Time, distance, money and other measured amounts often use less. For individual count objects, fewer is the usual edited choice.

YOUR TURN

You can count the tools one by one. Which phrase fits?

many tools / much tools

> **Answer • many tools**
> Many matches count items.

ONE LAST CHALLENGE

What should go on the shopping list?

You need rice and several individual lemons. Ask how much of each to buy.



A POSSIBLE ANSWER

How much rice should I buy? How many lemons do we need?

Rice is measured as an amount here. Lemons are counted separately.

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