Quantifiers

Definition
Quantifiers are a type of determiner which denote imprecise quantity. They differ from numbers or numerals which indicate precise quantity.

The most common examples:
the most common quantifiers used in English are:

some / any, much, many, a lot, a few, several, enough.

There are three types of quantifier: neutral quantifiers, quantifiers of large quantity, and quantifiers of small quantity

1. Neutral quantifiers:
   Some and any: several, a number of, enough

   Some and any are both quantifiers and articles. In many contexts, some is the plural indefinite article, the plural of "a" or "an"; but more often, some implies a limited quantity, and for this reason has the value of a quantifier.

   Some is used in affirmative statements; it is replaced with any in negative and interrogative contexts.

   Examples:
   I've got some apples in my basket and some water in my bottle.
   I haven't got any apples in my basket, nor any water in my bottle.
   Have you got any apples in your basket? Have you got any water in your bottle?
   We had some visitors last weekend, but we didn't have any this weekend.
   Have you got any rooms free for the night of September 30th?

   Several and a number of imply "more than one, but less than a lot". They are not usually used in negative or interrogative structures, only in affirmative statements. For example:

   There are several books / a number of books by J.Z. Plummerman in our library.
   Several people / A number of people said that they'd seen the missing child.

   Enough implies a sufficient quantity; it is used in affirmations, negations and questions.

   We can get tickets for the concert, I've got enough money now.
   Have you got enough money for the tickets?

2. Large quantity quantifiers:
much, many, lots of, plenty of, numerous, a large number of, etc.

   Much and many; much is used with non count nouns (always in the singular); many is used with count nouns in the plural. (Click here for the difference between count nouns and non-count nouns).

   IMPORTANT NOTE: Much and many are not often used, in modern spoken English, in affirmative statements; but they are very commonly used in interrogative and negative contexts.

   Examples:
   I have many reasons for thinking that this man is innocent is acceptable, but rather formal; most English speakers would more naturally say:
   I have plenty of / a lot of / a large number of reasons for thinking ....

   Much whisky is of very good quality. This sentence is technically acceptable, but not probable in modern English. Most people would say (and write):
   A lot of whisky / A good proportion of whisky / Plenty of whisky ......

   Remember this principle: don't use much or many in affirmative statements.

   Lots of, a lot of, plenty of, a large number of, numerous.

   These expressions all mean more or less exactly the same. In the list above, they are arranged in order of formality, going from the most informal (lots of) to the most formal (numerous). Informal language is more appropriate in dialogue, formal language in written documents.
3. Small quantity quantifiers:
-few, a few, little, a little, not many, not much, a small number of, etc..

These quantifiers are normally only used in affirmative statements, to which they give a negative colouring.

Little, a little, not much are used with non count nouns (always in the singular)
Few, a few, not many are used with count nouns in the plural.

Examples:
Few people can speak more than three languages
A few (of the) paintings in this gallery are really good.
There's little point in trying to mend it. You'll never succeed!
I've got a little money left; let's go and have a drink.

4 Recapitulation: table of usage for common English quantifiers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Affirmative</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Interrogative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large quantity</td>
<td>some, several, a number of, enough</td>
<td>any, enough</td>
<td>any, enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small quantity</td>
<td>few / a few, Little / a little</td>
<td>much, many, too many</td>
<td>much, many, too many</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Few or a few, little or a little?

The difference between the two expressions in each phrase is purely one of meaning, not of usage.
Without the article, few and little (used respectively with count nouns and non-count nouns) have the meaning of "not much/ not many, and possibly less than one might hope for or expect". These expressions have a negative value to them.
With the article, a few and a little have the meaning of "at least some, perhaps more than one might expect". These expressions have a positive value.

Examples:
Few of my friends were there, so I was disappointed.
A few of my friends were there, so I was quite happy.
Hurry up; there's little time left!
We have a little time to spare, so let's stop and have a cup of coffee

Extra, examples......

A few and few, a little and little

These expressions show the speaker's attitude towards the quantity he/she is referring to.

A few (for countable nouns) and a little (for uncountable nouns) describe the quantity in a positive way:

- "I've got a few friends" (= maybe not many, but enough)
- "I've got a little money" (= I've got enough to live on)

Few and little describe the quantity in a negative way:

They are like comparatives and hold a relative position on a scale of increase or decrease.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INCREASE (0% to 100%)</th>
<th>With uncountable nouns:</th>
<th>With plural countable nouns:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With plural countable nouns:</td>
<td>much</td>
<td>few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>many</td>
<td>more</td>
<td>fewer</td>
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<tr>
<td>most</td>
<td></td>
<td>fewest</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DECREASE (100% to 0%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With uncountable nouns:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples:

- There are **many** people in Poland, **more** in India, but the **most** people live in China.
- **Much** time and money is spent on education, **more** on health services but the **most** is spent on national defense.
- **Few** rivers in Europe aren’t polluted.
- **Fewer** people die young now than in the nineteenth century.
- The country with the **fewest** people per square kilometre must be Australia.
- Scientists have **little** hope of finding a complete cure for cancer before 2010.
- She had **less** time to study than I did but had better results.
- Give that dog the **least** opportunity and it will bite you.

**Quantifiers with countable and uncountable nouns**

Some adjectives and adjectival phrases can only go with uncountable nouns (salt, rice, money, advice), and some can only go with countable nouns (friends, bags, people). The words in the middle column can be used with both countable and uncountable nouns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With Uncountable Nouns</th>
<th>With Both</th>
<th>With Countable Nouns</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much?</td>
<td>How much? or How many?</td>
<td>How many?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a little</td>
<td>no/none</td>
<td>a few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a bit (of)</td>
<td>not any</td>
<td>a number (of)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a great deal of</td>
<td>some (any)</td>
<td>several</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a large amount of</td>
<td>a lot of</td>
<td>a large number of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a large quantity of</td>
<td>plenty of</td>
<td>a great number of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** **much** and **many** are used in negative and question forms.

Example:

- **How much** money have you got?
- **How many** cigarettes have you smoked?
- There's **not much** sugar in the cupboard.
- There weren’t **many** people at the party.

**They are also used with too, (not) so, and (not) as**

There were **too many** people at the party.
It's a problem when there are **so many** people.
There's **not so much** work to do this week.

In positive statements, we use a **lot of**:

- I've got a **lot of** work this week.
- There were a **lot of** people at the concert.