A few ways to indicate how many

In English, several terms or phrases indicate quantity when an exact number is not available or is not important. In fact, the previous sentence used one: *several*. Others include *many* and *few*. Although these terms are purposefully inexact, it is important to be thoughtful about which term you choose so that a reader understands your intention.

*Many* indicates “a large but indefinite number.”¹

**Examples:**

Many of the patients recovered after receiving second-line therapy. This treatment has been tested in many hospitals.

*Several* has a similar meaning to *many* but indicates a smaller amount: “more than two but fewer than many.”²

**Examples:**

Several of the patients reported feeling fatigued after the treatment was administered. Several studies have reported findings similar to ours.

_Few_ indicates “only a small number.”^3

**Example:**
Few studies have examined this topic.

Although _few_ is an adjective in the example above, it is a noun when used in the phrase _a few_, and this phrase has a subtly different meaning from _few_. The phrase _a few_ shifts the focus from the small number of items to the characteristics of those items.

**Example:**
Few patients recovered from the illness after receiving the treatment, and a few of these individuals who recovered later experienced a relapse of symptoms.

In addition, an adjective can be added to the phrase _a few_ to make its meaning more specific.^4

**Examples:**
A select few studies have examined this topic; we review those results here.
An unlucky few patients experienced serious side effects, which included hypertension, neuropathy, and thrombocytopenia.

**References**


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