Mathematics Mastery

‘More and fewer’ or ‘greater and less’?

Consider these two lists:

List A	List B
Number of children in a family	The length of a leaf
Number of tulips in a garden	The weight of a dog
Number of cars in a garage	The height of a tree
Number of sheep in a flock	The time it takes to run a race
Number of planes on an airfield	The speed of a train
Counting numbers	Numbers on a number line

You will notice that the numbers is list A can only take certain exact values such as 0, 1, 2, 3 and other positive whole numbers. We call this **discrete** data.

The numbers in list B, however, cannot be found exactly – they are only as accurate as the measuring device we use. For example, how tall are you? 150 cm? 152cm? 152.1 cm? 152.13cm? We call this **continuous** data and when we use it we work to appropriate degrees of accuracy – you would probably give your height correct to the nearest centimetre, you would give a time to the nearest minute, second or hour depending on the context.

When working with discrete data we use the comparison words ‘more’ and ‘fewer’. For example:

- There are **fewer** children in the Smith family than in the Dean family
- There are **more** cars in the garage than on the drive

When working with continuous data we use the comparison words ‘greater’ and ‘less’. For example:

- My pet cat weighs **less** than my pet dog
- The height of the school building is **greater** than the height of my house