1.1 Comparing

We can use various words and structures to express the degree of difference between things we are comparing. Some of the most common and useful words and structures include:

- nowhere near/nothing like (not) nearly/not/not quite/almost/just/every bit/twice/three times + as (adjective/adverb) as
  Life is nothing like as simple as it used to be. He’s every bit as argumentative as he always was.
- much/far/a lot/a great deal/considerably/significantly/10%/five hours/a little/a little bit/slightly/no + comparative adjective or comparative adverb
  The internet is a great deal faster than it was a few years ago. This engine runs 30% more efficiently.
- much/many/far/a great deal/a lot/a little/a bit + more/fewer/less + noun
  You’ve got far more Facebook friends than me. I have a lot less free time than I used to.
- as much/many + noun as
  There isn’t as much pollution as there used to be in city centres.
- the more ... the more ...
  We can use this structure when one situation automatically results in another situation. We use the ... the with the comparative forms of adjectives/adverbs, verb clauses and nouns.
  With most computers, the bigger the memory, the more expensive it is. The longer you work, the more money you earn.

Remember that we use fewer and many with countable nouns and less and much with uncountable nouns. We use more with both countable and uncountable nouns.

- There are many fewer cars. There is much less traffic.
- There are many more cars. There is much more traffic.

We can use more and more, fewer and fewer, less and less, + noun and bigger and bigger, longer and longer, etc. to give emphasis and to show the difference is increasing.

More and more people are working for less and less money these days.
Computer memories are getting bigger and bigger all the time.

1 Complete sentences 1–8 with the words in the box.

an hour far fewer less no nothing like quicker the

1 Her second book is ________ as good as the first one.
The first one is brilliant, but the follow-up is far weaker.
2 This hotel is ________ nicer than the one we stayed in last year. There’s no comparison.
3 Far ________ people have a landline than, say, ten years ago. Most people just use mobiles these days.
4 I’m spending a lot ________ money these days and trying to save as much as I can.
5 Broadband speeds are getting quicker and ________ all the time.
6 This one is ________ bigger than that one. In fact, they’re exactly the same size.
7 The more you put into something, ________ more you get out of it.
8 It takes ________ longer to go by bus than by train.

2 Read the blog comparing life in the 1970s with life now. Choose the correct alternative.

Looking back to when I was a child in the 1970s, I seem to remember that life was ________ a lot / many / much happier to make their own amusement and didn’t need to always be looking at a screen of some description. There were generally ________ fewer / much less / nothing like distractions in those days. And the less we had, ________ we more / the more we / more we entertained ourselves. I think it made us ________ much / more / considerably independent and creative than a lot of kids today.

It seemed a ________ just / much / lot safer environment for kids. We could play outside all day without anyone worrying about where or how safe we were. There was ________ less and less / much less / nowhere near traffic on the roads and we often used to play in the streets.

I think food was ________ every bit / quite a bit / quite a bit healthier in some ways. It wasn’t ________ quite / as much / as varied as it is today but at the same time there wasn’t ________ as many / as much / less junk food or pre-prepared convenience foods. To be honest, I think in many ways we were ________ a lot / a lot more / more and ________ healthier.

At school, we didn’t learn ________ as many / a great deal / nothing like as many subjects as there seem to be today, but we did learn the basics very well. I think my generation’s English, for example, is ________ far more / every bit / a bit better than a lot of kids today.