

Use of certain longer and shorter alternatives

In English there are some shorter alternatives for longer phrases. For example, we can use much or many instead of a lot of. In the same way, we can use far instead of a long way. But note that the longer forms and shorter forms are used in different cases.

The longer forms are generally preferred in affirmative sentences. The shorter forms are used in negatives and questions.

Compare:

I have a lot of work to do. (Affirmative)

Do you have much work to do? (NOT Do you have a lot of work to do?)

No, I don't have much work to do. (NOT No, I don't have a lot of work to do.)

Plenty of people wish to start their own businesses.

Are there many people who wish to start their own businesses?

Yes, but there aren't many people who actually manage to do it. (You can't say: There aren't plenty of people who actually manage to do it.)

There is a great deal of controversy about stem cell research.

Is there much controversy about stem cell research?

No, there isn't much controversy about it.

The airport is a long way off.

Is the airport far off?

No, it isn't far off.

Grammar notes

Many and far are occasionally used in the affirmative, but much is almost never used in that way. The longer forms are not usually used in the negative, but they are occasionally used in questions.