



The *Cueva de las Manos* or 'Cave of the Hands' in Argentina is in the region of 9,000 years old. Visitors to the ancient paintings arrive at the edge of a canyon and then walk for two hours, more or less, until they reach the caves. A lot of the paint is a kind of reddish, brownish colour which outlines well over eight hundred hands. Most of the hands are male and thirty or so are right-handed; they all resemble the approximate hand-size of a 13-year old child.

Presentation

We often use approximate language in spoken and informal written English when it is not important to give exact details or when exact details aren't known.

Numbers

Put the following words before the number:

**some nine thousand years old* (= approximately 9,000)
around / about / roughly / approximately / in the region of / something like 9,000

**some* before a number suggests a large number.

eight hundred-odd hands*

eight hundred or so hands

two hours, more or less

*-*odd* can mean 'approximately' or 'a little more than the number mentioned'

Talk about large amounts like this:

dozens of hands, hundreds of hands, loads of hands

Talk about amounts over/above or below/under:

well under/over, above/below (= a large difference)

just / a little under/over, above/below (= a little difference)

Adjectives

We use *kind of* when we can't think of a better adjective to describe something:

It's kind of paint.

The suffix *-ish* makes an adjective less exact. You can use *-ish* with adjectives describing physical features (size, colour) and time:

It's bluish, it's yellowish, it's shortish, it's roundish.

We're meeting at three-ish.

some

Use *some* plus a singular noun to refer to an unknown or unspecified person or thing:

I hope you have some idea of where we're going.

I read about it in some book.

stuff and thing(s)

Stuff and *thing(s)* are 'vague' words which refer to a substance, material or group of objects. Use *stuff* and *thing(s)* when you don't know the name, the name is not important or when it's obvious what you're talking about.

What's that black stuff in the water?

(*stuff* = uncountable noun)

Remember to pack all your things in the case.

(*thing/things* = countable noun)

1 Match the two halves of the sentence.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 About a hundred or | a , more or less. |
| 2 A hundred | b -odd tourists visited. |
| 3 In the region | c so tourist visited. |
| 4 Something | d a hundred tourists visited. |
| 5 A hundred tourists visited | e like a hundred tourists visited. |
| 6 A little over | f of a hundred tourists visited. |

2 Complete the sentences with the words or parts of words in the box.

-ish just kind of like odd so some

- About fifty or people work in my company.
- Have you seen a small box? It's square with a metal lid.
- We must have idea about where it is.
- They say about three hundred- people turned out to watch the fireworks.
- At sixty-nine kilometres per hour, we were under the speed limit.
- Something four billion people watched the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games.

3 Make these sentences less precise by replacing the bold nouns with *stuff*, *thing* or *things*.

- Can you pick up all your **toys**, please? things
- What's all this **juice** on the floor?
- Pull that **lever** at the side of the machine.
- There's a pile of your **clothes** that needs washing.
- This jar has purple **chemicals** inside it.
- I have so many **little jobs** to do today.

4 Complete the description of a place in England with the missing approximation words or parts of words.

Of all the ¹ that people associate with England, Stonehenge is probably one of the best-known. It's become a ² of symbol of pre-historic England. However, in ³ parts of England you'll also find other standing stone monuments; in fact, only thirty minutes or ⁴ up the road from Stonehenge, there are the stone circles of Avebury. Like Stonehenge, the stones at Avebury are grey ⁵ in colour. However, the circles at Avebury cover an area of well ⁶ twelve hectares so the site is much bigger than Stonehenge. Originally, there would have been something ⁷ 400 standing stones and it is estimated they took in the ⁸ of 1.5 million man hours to construct.

