



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 have 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:

***around / about / roughly / approximately / in the region of / something like 9,000***

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

***some nine thousand years old*** (approximately 9,000)

Other phrases come after the number:

***two hours, more or less***

***eight hundred or so hands***

***eight hundred-odd hands*** (-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 brown.***

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)

## Exercises

## 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 tourists 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
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- About fifty or ..... people work in my company.
  - Have you seen a small box? It's square ..... with a ..... metal lid.
  - They 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 <sup>1</sup>..... that people associate with England, Stonehenge is probably one of the best-known. It's become a <sup>2</sup>..... of symbol of prehistoric England. However, in <sup>3</sup>..... parts of England you'll also find other standing stone monuments; in fact, only thirty minutes or <sup>4</sup>..... up the road from Stonehenge, there are the stone circles of Avebury. Like Stonehenge, the stones at Avebury are grey <sup>5</sup>..... in colour. However, the circles at Avebury cover an area of well <sup>6</sup>..... twelve hectares, so the site is much bigger than Stonehenge. Originally, there would have been something <sup>7</sup>..... 400 standing stones and it is estimated they took in the <sup>8</sup>..... of 1.5 million man hours to construct.

