



Less

Exceptional Expressions For Everyday Events

The word **less** shares some traits with its counterpart, **more**. It, too, is a comparative word that functions as an adjective, an adverb, or a noun, but **less** refers to smaller rather than larger quantities: Unfortunately, this fall's bake sale raised less money than last year's. Rita was less happy with this week's test score than last week's. The less Teresa practiced her guitar, the worse she played. Furthermore, in its mathematical uses, **less** is even a preposition: One dollar less forty cents equals sixty cents. Five is less than ten.

Also like **more**, **less** is part of a set of comparison words: **little**, **less**, and **least**. David enjoyed eggplant a little, he enjoyed broccoli less, and he enjoyed brussel sprouts least of all. **Less**, too, is used with verbs, adjectives, and adverbs to express comparisons and degrees. Because he was busy, Michael listened less to music than he used to. Because this assignment was too easy for him, Ralph found it less interesting than the last one. Because he was distracted, Frank listened less attentively to his teacher than usual.

Follow-Ups

- What do you think the statement “Less is more” might mean?
- What does it mean to be less than perfect?
- How does “less hope” different from “hopeless”?

The Spanish Connection

Less comes from an Old English word that described anything that was small. It is not clear whether the older word was used in the context of comparisons, as **less** primarily is today. The Spanish word for **less** is *menos*. **Less** and *menos* are not cognates, but some of the synonyms for **less** do have Spanish cognates.

Word Changes

- Often we hear or see the word **less** used interchangeably with the word **fewer**. Even though this is a common practice, more formal usage often distinguishes between the two. This usage requires that **fewer** be used with nouns that can be counted (fewer calories, fewer dollars, fewer people) while **less** is used with nouns that are singular or more abstract (less fat, less money, less population).
- The suffix **-less** comes from an Old English word meaning “devoid of.” This meaning has been retained in the many words with this suffix, for instance: hopeless, tasteless, tireless, homeless, fearless, sugarless, and skinless. There is a distinct difference in affect between the use of **less** and the use of **-less**.



Less



Less as in fewer in amount or quantity

- few
- little
- hardly any
- some
- couple
- minute
- handful
- tiny
- miniscule

Less as in lower in importance

- inferior
- poor
- substandard
- low-grade
- mediocre
- second-rate



Less

COMMON PHRASES

- I could care less
- Less than pleased
- Less and less

IDIOMS

- Less is more
- More or less

PROVERB

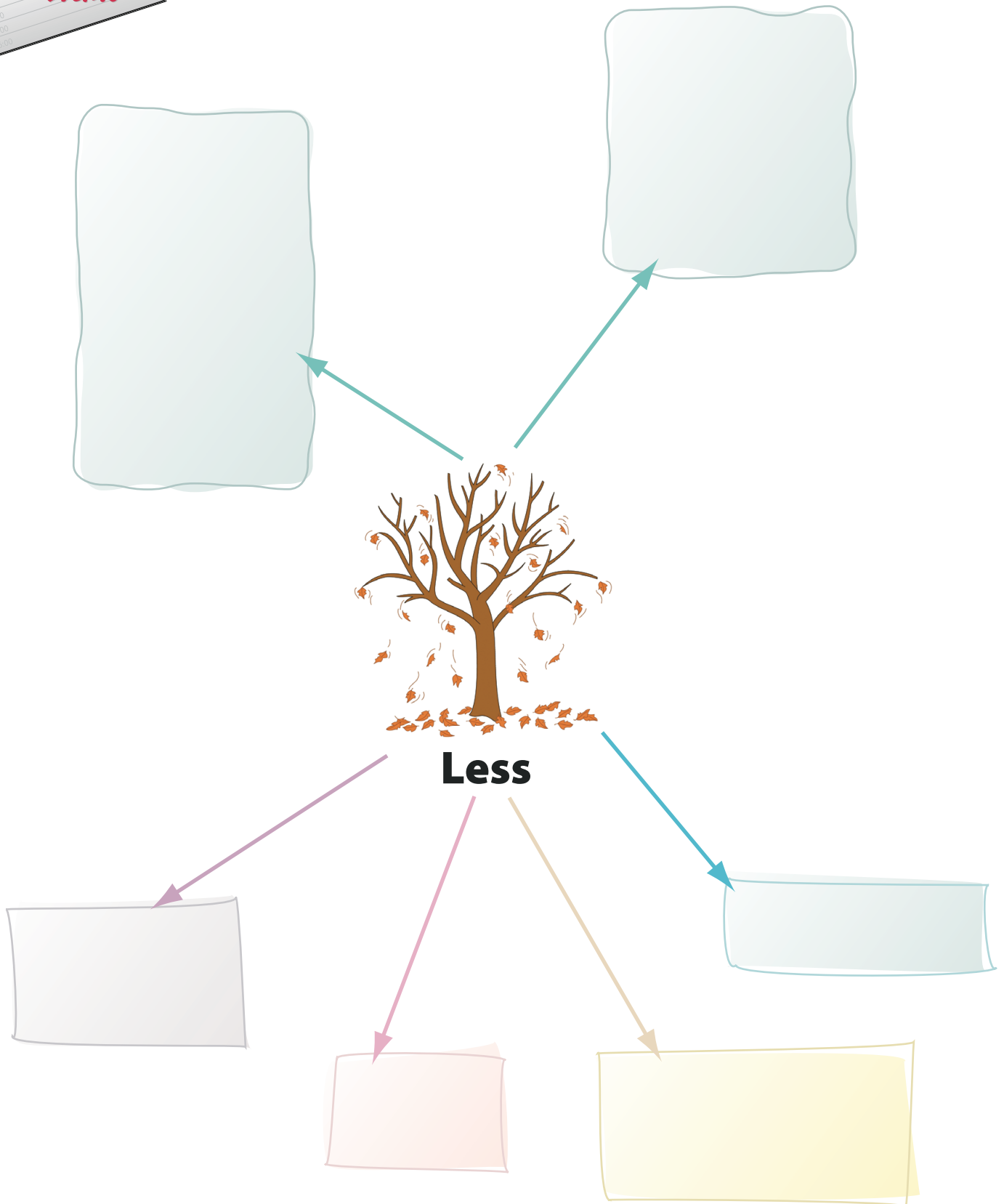
"The lesser of two evils."

THE SPANISH CONNECTION

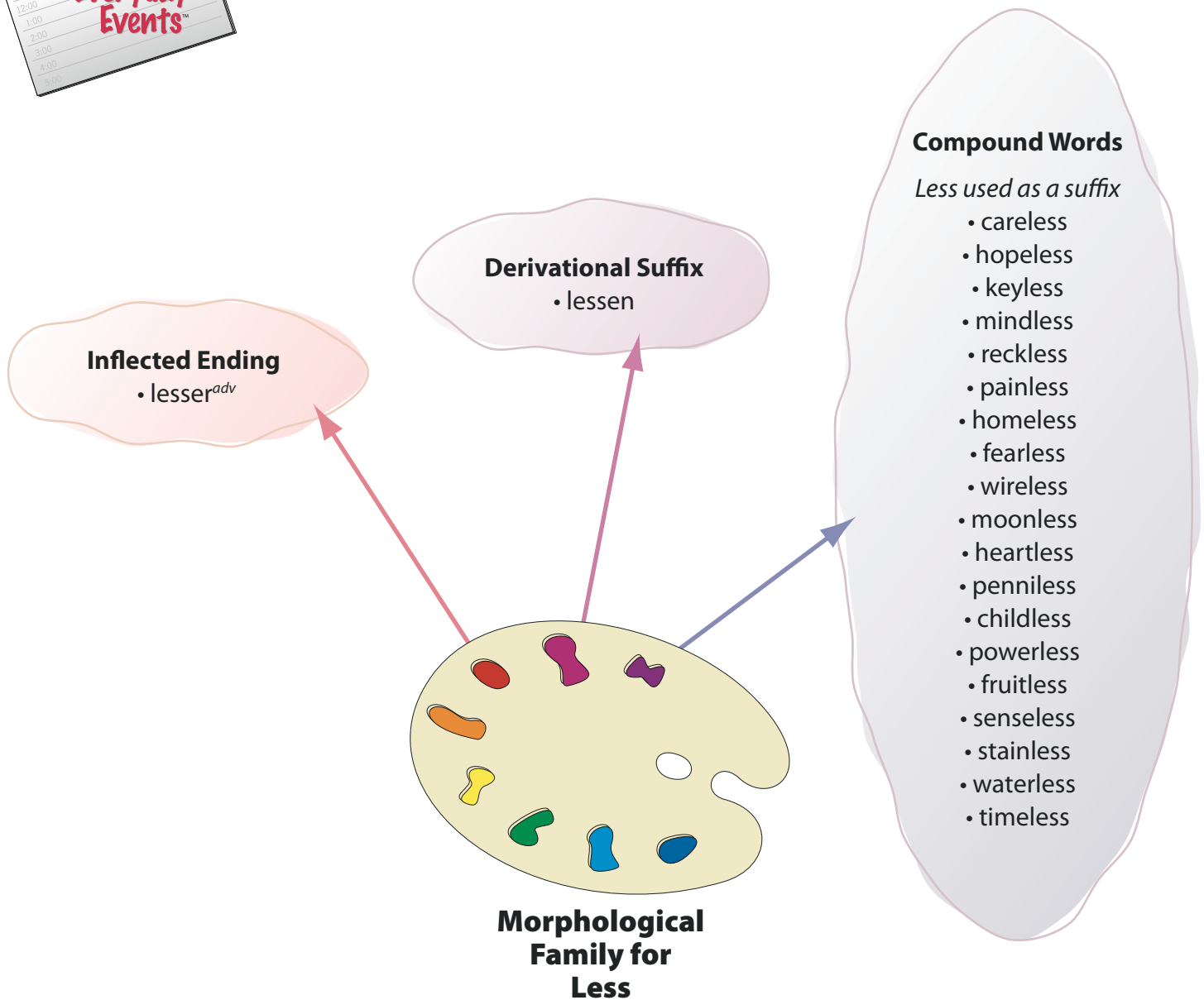
- miniscule / minúsculo(a)
- inferior / inferior
- mediocre / mediocre



Less



Less



^{adv} Less used as an adverb



Less

