

-less

1. Lacking something

Productive use: -less combines with nouns to form adjectives. Adjectives formed in this way describe people or things that do not have or do whatever is referred to. For example, if something is “harmless” it cannot harm you; of something is “meaningless”, it has no meaning.

Most people think of measles as harmless.

The injustice of it all left me speechless.

The room, was characterless, a clean neat room with oddments of furniture.

He hummed a tuneless song to himself.

Note that some adjectives formed in this way are used in a non-literal way. For example, if you describe somebody as ‘brainless’, you mean that you think that they are stupid and silly.

You’re brainless. You can’t even count.

He was a spineless coward.

- Here are some examples of words with this meaning:

Airless *flawless* *meaningless* *speechless*

Beltless *harmless* *motherless* *spineless*

Brainless *heartless* *motionless* *spotless*

Characterless *helpless* *nameless* *tactless*

Childless *hopeless* *powerless* *thoughtless*

Effortless *humorless* *restless* *tuneless*

Endless *lifeless* *seedless* *useless*

2. Exceeding a category

-less also combines with nouns or verbs to form adjectives. Adjectives formed in this way describe people or things whose qualities cannot be measured in terms of whatever the noun or verb refers to. For example, if a group of things is ‘countless’, it is so big that it is almost impossible to count them; if a work of art is ‘priceless’, it is so valuable that it is impossible to put a price on it that matches its worth.

...sausage, pork pies, hamburgers, chips, ice cream, cakes and countless other products.

A small, spry, ageless nun dragged the gate open.

- Here is a list of words with this meaning:

Ageless *countless* *numberless* *priceless* *timeless*