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These collection words are not technical. They don't specify an exact percent. They are vague and fluid. One can count items and determine percentages exactly, but most (all? see below!) collection words work with amounts that are inexact. But they do have some relative informal strengths

The following is an ordering of some collection words in English with an explanation for each. Assume that '...of the time' follows, e.g. 'I spend none of the time at house A' none - No time is spent. You are perceived to be wrong or lying if you have spent any time at the house at all. little - hardly any time at all. This is sort of relative. Presumably something else in the discussion has more. a little - towards the smaller amount. slightly different from simply 'little'. It is not as relative as 'little'. Parallel to 'few' and 'a few'. some - An unspecified amount, neither implying a lot nor a little. This is the vaguest one of all. All that is implied is that it is not all and it is not none (because pragmatically, you would have use one of those extremes if it were the case). An academic might say "I have some publications in that area" to be a tiny bit misleading because they only have 2. There is a technical meaning of 'some' which is 'not none' or 'at least one'. So logically one can have one out of a million and still have 'some'. But the natural inclination is that it is more than one. a lot - this is like some neither none nor all, but also not few. After that it can be anywhere from more than a few to almost all. There is no comparison here or rather it is a comparison of feeling rather than number. That is, you can truthfully say 'There are a lot of tall people in this room' if everybody is of one height and a handful of tall people stick out. much - I find this synonymous with 'a lot' but is a little more formal register (but still vague and non-technical). most - this is in the direction of 'all' and is comparative, meaning more than any other. The general idea is that it is 'almost all' but because it is so vague, it can be used for anything that is more than anything else. If there are two things to compare, then this must be more than 50%. all - absolutely every bit and nothing else. (for simplicity's sake, I've left out 'several' 'few' and other similar terms for 'count nouns') Except for the two extremes, none and all, they are all vague to some extent. There is no specific number or ratio that must be adhered to. They vary depending on context. The ordering given shows their expected order in general but one may be more than the other in one context and maybe the other way in another context. Also, these words show the difficulty in dictionary definitions. One online definition for 'most' is "greatest in amount or degree." with a single sample "they've had the most success". But this is actually in the context of 'the most' not the simple 'most'. The definition is close but doesn't specify all the subtlety. The related technical words are majority and plurality. 'Majority' means '>=50%', as in elections. 'Plurality' means a higher percentage than any other choice, could be but not necessarily a majority. Your instance I spend most of my time at A is not wrong. If someone did not know the percentages, they'd probably assume more than 1/2 your time was spent at A, but if they saw a tabulation, they would not think you are wrong. It looks then like 'most' is equivalent to 'plurality', and I think they are very close. But 'most' is still vague. Like 'a couple' (which literally means two), 'most' might be used aspirationally and is used often just to mean 'a lot'. Which one of the following sentences is the most canonical? I know most vs. the most has been explained a lot, but my doubts pertain specifically to which one to use at the end of a sentence. Do you know accepting answers improves your reputation and lets other users know what solution helped you the most? vs Do you know accepting answers improves your reputation and lets other users know what solution helped you most? EDIT: This question doesn't solve my doubts because it is not about using "most" and "the most" specifically as an adverb at the end of a sentence. 1 Most is what is called a determiner. A determiner is "a word, such as a number, article, personal pronoun, that determines (limits) the meaning of a noun phrase." Some determiners can only be used with either a countable noun or an uncountable noun, while others, like most, can be used with both countable and uncountable nouns. Uncountable nouns usually take a singular verb. So, in your example, this is the correct form for your sentence: "Most companies are private." The plural noun is needed after the word most (company, referring to a business entity, is a countable noun, with a standard plural form [companies]), and then the plural verb is needed to construct a grammatically correct sentence. But a sentence such as, "Most information is now obtained from the Internet." would take the singular verb (since information is considered an uncountable noun). Interestingly, company can be an uncountable noun, but it then has a different definition than in your example. For example, " Most company leaves after two or three days," is a perfectly acceptable sentence. In this case, company has the definition of a social gathering of guests or companions. Here are a couple of additional links to information about determiners and uncountable nouns. The sense of history used here identifies a particular period. Now just what that period is may be unclear or may differ between similar uses (in particular, whether prehistory—the period before writing was invented and hence written records available—is included or not will differ between uses). But despite this ambiguity, it still refers to one particular thing. While we do not capitalise it, it's more a proper noun in this sense than it is a common noun, for just as Jon identifies one person (in a given use), history in this use identifies one period, albeit the period that covers everything. Other uses of history are countable or mass uses: To take StoneyB's examples: Most history is lies. This uses history as a mass noun to cover all that is said about the past. Hence most is used to identify the greater part of that mass, that is to say the greater part all that is said about the past. Most histories are boring. This uses history as a countable noun, to refer to a particular account. (Or rather in the plural, to refer to particular accounts). Here most identifies a certain number of this plural amount. During most of history, humans were too busy to think about thought. This uses history as a proper noun, to refer to a particular period in time. We could interpret it either as since writing began, or since humans began (from context we clearly don't care about earlier than that), but however we interpret it, it's talking about one individual, particular period. It uses most of to identify the larger part of that particular period. In comparison, water: Most waters are healthy. Uses water as a countable noun, in the plural (as can be done to differentiate water from different sources), and applies most to that plural number. Most water is healthy. Uses water as a mass noun, and applies most to that mass. Now, we don't have a sense of water on its own that applies to one individual. We can though use "the water" to apply to a particular bit of water. Most of the water is healthy. Again, because we're dealing with an individual case, we use most of rather than most Generally we use "most..." or "most of the...". The first refers to the majority of all that the noun phrase refers to "most butterflies are pretty". The second refers to a particular identified set of what the noun phrase refers to "most of the butterflies I've seen were pretty". The difference is unspecific group vs. specific group. Because history in the sense of the question is already specific, without a definite article, we're essentially using the "most of the..." form, but without the the. Likewise, with proper nouns, we only use the if the is normally part of that proper noun; "Most of Europe" and "Most of the Rolling Stones" differ because we don't say "the Europe" but we do say "the Rolling Stones". Maybe you can simply change the construction: Books are what I've most read, or, I've read more books than anything else, or, I've read mostly books. In your example, books ARE what you have read most, so I would agree that in diagrammatic reasoning most of what you've read ARE books. Of all of the various materials I've read, most ARE books. Therefore, because MOST refers to books, and BOOKS is a plural noun, I'm sorry to say that your friend is correct. "But what I remembered most is moving a lot" is correct, with or without "the". Although "the most" is the superlative, preferable. Here, "most" is used as an adverb modifying the verb "remember", meaning "to the greatest extent". There may be other examples, where it can mean "extremely" as in the following:"It was most kind of you". "that is most probably correct". As an adjective while qualifying a noun, it takes "the" as in the following example: Here's the most expensive book I ever bought. As a noun, "most" takes the definite article. For example, "The most (that) you can do is to try again." For further review: "Who" is a subjective pronoun. It is used in the place of a subject in a sentence or phrase. For example "Who is coming to dinner?" ("Who" is the subject.) "Whom" is an objective pronoun. It is used in the place of an object in a sentence or phrase. For example, "With whom are you coming to dinner?" ("Whom" is the object of the preposition, while "you" is the subject.) Since "most of ____" is a prepositional phrase, the correct usage would be "most of whom." The phrase "most of who" should probably never be used. Another way to think about the difference between the subjective/objective pronouns is to revise the sentence to include a personal pronoun and see which form (he/him or she/her or they/them) fit. For example, take this sentence: "I have twelve co-workers, most of whom are British." Could you re-write it as two sentences: "I have twelve co-workers. Most of they are British?" Probably not! You would say "Most of them are British," because the "most of" prepositional construct takes an objective pronoun. I can't think of a case where it would take a subjective pronoun. As to whether you would use "most of whom" or "most of which," both "who" and "which" are relative pronouns. "Who" is used to refer to people, while "which" is used to refer to animals and things. For example, "I have twelve co-workers, most of whom are French, and I have twelve wine bottles, most of which are empty." Sometimes "which" might be used to refer to a group or crowd of people where individuality is less distinct. For example, "The crowd, most of which were local fans, cheered when the opposing pitcher got knocked unconscious by a line drive." I believe either "most of whom" or "most of which" could be used in that kind of sentence. ===== I did a few searches in Google books to see if I could find a pattern. It seems like more hits are found when the article is omitted rather than added. Here are my results (all searches were done "in quotes"): Things I love most: 8310 results Things I love the most. 1570 Things I hate most: 2060 Things I hate the most: 195 Things that bother me most: 859 Things that bother me the most: 207 Things I like best: 25,000 Things I like the best: 295 Things I do best: 6890 Things I do the best: 1870 Given that a pattern is emerging, the next question would be: Why? I remember one tip for effective writing: eliminate extraneous words. That admonition is found all over the web. For example, such words are called flab in this blog; the same exhortation is buried into Tip #9 of this writer's guide: 9) Write more than one draft of your essay. Great writing comes from revision. Eliminate extraneous words and phrases. After you revise, be sure to proofread and spell-check your work. Proof-reading is not the same as revising! I'm guessing that it's often omitted because it's unnecessary. Which leads me to the last pair of queries I ran (not in Google books, but just as a Google web search): Eliminate extraneous words: 5890 Eliminate the extraneous words: 68 This topic has been covered at Language Log (see here and here). In summary, people tend to use "most" to mean anything over 50%; some people feel it should only be used in sense C (a comfortable majority), but it is also used in sense A (a plurality). The context might make it clear which meaning is intended, or else it might simply be ambiguous. Example: The party with the most seats in the parliament gets to form the government Here "most" means "a plurality". Most dentists recommend Colgate toothpaste. Here it is ambiguous about whether there is a bare majority or a comfortable majority. From the 2nd Language Log link: I searched on Google for the pattern "most * percent", and picked out of the first 150 hits all the examples like these: most Pakistanis (64 percent) believe it is important to improve relations with their powerful ally Most (72.4 percent) said that they would consider dating someone of a different race. Most Americans (51.4 percent) will live in poverty at some point before age 65. There were 72 numbers in my list, and the histogram of 69 of them looked like this: You might believe that this is a bimodal distribution, with one mode just above 60% and another just above 80% — though if you divide things up into ten-percent bins, the stretch from 60 to 90 flattens out: In any event, it's pretty clear that the whole range from 50.1 to 99.9 is getting some action. The three examples that I left out of the histogram were cases where "most" meant "a plurality", i.e. the subset with the largest proportion even though that proportion was less than 0.5 [...] I've recently come across a novel called A most wanted man, after which being curious I found a TV episode called A most unusual camera. Could someone shed some light on how to use "a most" and whether it has anything to do with "the most"?

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