**Small** refers to size. It is the opposite of **big** or **large**.

Elephants are **large**, cats are **small** and rats are **smaller** still.

They have bought a **small house** in the city.

**The small hours** = the early hours (1 am to 4 am.)

**Small talk** = talk about unimportant things.

She is on the **small side**. = She is a little too small.

In many cases both **small** and **little** are possible. However, little is preferred in cases where we also want to express some sort of emotion.

Poor **little** thing. (More natural than ‘Poor small thing’.)

She is a pretty **little** woman.

Both little and small are possible in some fixed expressions. Examples are:

*Little finger / small finger*

*The little hand of the clock / the small hand of the clock*

**British and American English differences**

In British English, **little** is not normally used in the predicative position (after a verb). Comparative and superlative forms are also much less common. In American English, **little** is normal in the predicative position. Comparative and superlative forms are also very common.

She is the **littlest** woman I have ever seen. (US)

She is the **smallest** woman I have ever seen. (GB)

**Little** can mean **hardly at all**.

I have little interest in politics.

**A little** means rather.

She is a little better today.

**Little by little** = gradually
Her health improved **little by little.**