

# Adjectives and Adverbs

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

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## Adjectives

Adjectives are words that describe or modify nouns and pronouns. They tell what kind, how many, or which one.

### Location

Adjectives usually precede a noun or follow a linking verb.

EXAMPLES: She has **dark** hair. (*Dark* precedes the noun, *hair*.)  
He is an **intelligent** person. (*Intelligent* precedes the noun, *person*.)  
She looks **happy**. (*Happy* describes the pronoun, *she*.)

### Adjectives in Comparisons

Comparisons are shown by adding *-er* or *-est* to the end of the word or *more* or *the most* before the adjective. A few adjectives, like *good* and *bad*, change form completely.

-ER/-EST: She is **kind**.  
She is **kinder** than Melissa. (comparative)  
She is the **kindest** person in the group. (superlative)

MORE/MOST Jane is **intelligent**.  
Jane is **more intelligent** than Victor. (comparative)  
Jane is **the most intelligent** student in the class. (superlative)

FORM CHANGE Apples are **good**.  
Apples are **better** than oranges. (comparative)  
Apples are the **best** afternoon snack. (superlative)

### Articles as Adjectives

Articles (*a*, *an*, and *the*) are a subcategory of adjectives. For more information, see our handout **Articles**.

### Order of Adjectives in a Sentence

When two or more adjectives modify a noun, they usually occur in the following order:

1. Determiner: (*a*, *an*, *the*, *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*), possessives (*its*, *our*), quantity words (*several*, *three*)
2. Adjective of evaluation: *boring*, *disgusting*, *comfortable*, *cheap*, *heavy*
3. Adjective describing size: *little*, *big*, *huge*
4. Adjective describing shape: *round*, *square*, *long*
5. Adjective describing age: *new*, *young*, *old*
6. Adjective describing color: *green*, *red*, *blue*
7. Adjective describing nationality: *Asian*, *Italian*
8. Adjective describing faith: *Catholic*, *Muslim*
9. Adjective describing material: *metal*, *wooden*, *plastic*
10. Noun used as an adjective: *kitchen* cabinet, *writing* desk

EXAMPLES: **The huge, majestic, snow-covered** mountains are visible from our room.  
**A delicious, inexpensive, Italian** meal makes me happy.  
He was **a consistent, hardworking, invaluable** player.

**Note:** It is usually most effective to find one or two adjectives that precisely capture your meaning than to use long lists of adjectives.

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## Adverbs

Adverbs describe verbs, other adverbs, and adjectives, as well as whole clauses.

### Use of Adverbs

Adverbs often answer the questions *Where?*, *When?*, *How?*, and *To what extent?*.

EXAMPLES: He wrote **nearby**. (Where did he write? *Nearby*.)  
He wrote **yesterday**. (When did he write? *Yesterday*.)  
He wrote **carefully**. (How did he write? *Carefully*.)  
He wrote a draft that was **almost** complete. (To what extent? *Almost* complete.)

### Formation of Adverbs

Adverbs are often formed by adding the suffix *-ly* to an adjective.

EXAMPLES: **Unfortunately**, she left differently than he did.  
She **quickly** picked up the book and **curiously** began reading it.

Some adverbs are not derived from adjectives.

EXAMPLES: Ryan liked England **a lot**.  
The dog was fat because it loved food **so much**.  
The author writes **well**.

## Choosing Adjectives and Adverbs

Students sometimes use an adjective where an adverb is needed, or vice versa. Remember that adjectives modify nouns and pronouns, and adverbs modify verbs, adverbs, or other adjectives.

INCORRECT: Brandon and Melissa took the joke too **serious**. (*Serious* is intended to modify *took*, so an adverb—*seriously*—is needed in its place.)

CORRECT: Brandon and Melissa took the joke too **seriously**.

INCORRECT: I performed **good** on the test. (*Good* is intended to modify the verb *performed*, so an adverb—*well*—is needed in its place.)

CORRECT: I performed **well** on the test.

In some instances, your choice of an adjective or an adverb changes the meaning of the sentence.

EXAMPLES: The dog smells **bad**. (This sentence is saying that the dog stinks.)  
The dog smells **badly**. (This sentence is saying that the dog has a poor sense of smell.)