

Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives

Characteristics of Adjectives

1. **Adjectives modify nouns and pronouns. That is their only function.**
2. **An adjective can be a word, a phrase, or a clause.**
3. **An adjective can describe, identify, intensify, limit, negate, or otherwise alter a noun or pronoun.**
4. **Possessive nouns and pronouns always function like adjectives.**
5. **Numbers, colors, sizes, and quantities are always adjectives**

Single Word Adjectives (Adjectives are in **bold** font.)

The **brown** cow walked away. “Brown” is an adjective modifying the noun “cow.”

Gerard has **no** cars left on his lot. “No” is an adjective modifying the noun “cars.”

Phrases as adjectives (adjective phrases are in **bold** font.)

Prepositional phrases can be adjectives or adverbs.

I see a **brown cow behind the fence**. Just like “brown” is describing the cow, “Behind the fence” is a prepositional phrase identifying the cow.

The **brown cow is walking behind the fence**. Here, “behind the fence” is an adverb modifying the action “is walking.” (For more information on adverbs, see the next page.)

Present participial phrases can be adjectives.*

The **silly girl swimming with the sharks** was eaten in **five minutes**. In this sentence, the present participial phrase “**swimming with the sharks**” is an adjective because it is modifying the noun “girl.” Of course, “**silly**” and “**five**” are also adjectives modifying “**girl**” and “**minutes**.”

*Don’t always assume that a present participle is an adjective because these words sometimes work like a noun, and when they act like nouns, they are called gerunds. For example, in the following sentence, *Swimming **with sharks** is not a very **smart** thing to do*, *swimming* is a thing that can be done; therefore, it is acting like a noun; in fact, it is the subject of the verb “is.”

Past participial phrases are adjectives.

Defeated by their enemies, the army left town. In this sentence the past participial phrase “**defeated by their enemies**” is describing “*the army*,” therefore, it is acting like an adjective.

Infinitive phrases such as “to make,” to show,” and “to be,” can be adjectives, adverbs, or nouns.

(adj) **To make a lot of money**, a person must work hard. (modifies the noun “person”)

(adv) I tried **to show her a better system**. (modifies the verb “tried”)

(noun) **To be or not to be** is a good question. (functions as the subject of the verb “is”)

Subordinate Clauses beginning with a Relative Pronoun are either adjectives or function as noun clauses. (Adjective and noun clauses are in **bold** font.)

The cow, **which is brown**, walked away. (modifies the noun “cow”)

The dog **that bit the boy** had rabies. (modifies the noun “dog”)

The woman **who won the lottery** is young. (modifies the noun “woman”)

I went to the movies with a friend **whom my mother dislikes**. (modifies the noun “friend”)

The musician **whose album went platinum** was given an award. (modifies the noun “musician”)

I think **that we should leave now** (represents “the thought” hence functions as a noun.)

Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives, continued

Practice: In the following sentence, you will find three single word adjectives, two adjective phrases and an adjective clause that are all, each in its own way, modifying a noun or a pronoun. First locate all of the nouns and pronouns and then see if you can spot the words and groups of words that act like adjectives.

Walking through the misty swamp, Sarah, who had run away from home, saw a large alligator with an injured tail.

Adverbs

Characteristics of Adverbs

1. Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. In other words, adverbs modify any word that is not a noun or a pronoun.
2. Adverbs can describe, limit, enhance, or negate verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.
3. An adverb can be a single word, a phrase, or a clause.
4. Many, but not all, single word adverbs are created by adding “ly” to an adjective

Single Word Adverbs

Example: (adverbs in the following sentence are in **bold** font.)

*The large bear lumbered **very slowly** toward the dumpster and did **not** notice the **extremely** nervous hunters **carefully** crouched behind the trees.*

In the sentence above, **slowly** modifies the verb “lumbered,” **very** modifies the adverb “slowly,” **not** modifies the verb “notice,” **extremely** modifies the adjective “nervous,” and **carefully** modifies the verb “crouched.”

Many, not all, single word adverbs are created by adding “ly” to an adjective. Following are some examples of these adverbs created from adjectives. Notice that in our example sentence above, three of the five adverbs are created by adding “ly” to an adjective.

Adjective	Adverb	Adjective	Adverb
quick	quickly	Creative	creatively
slow	slowly	Real	really
angry	angrily	Loud	loudly
thoughtful	thoughtfully	Loving	lovingly
sad	sadly	Soft	softly

See if you can think of other words that start as adjectives and become adverbs by adding “ly.”

Adjective	Adverb	Adjective	Adverb

Phrases as adverbs

Prepositional phrases can be adjectives or adverbs.

*The **brown** cow is walking behind the fence.* “Behind the fence” is an adverb modifying the verb “is walking.”

*I see a **brown** cow **behind the fence**.* In this sentence, “Behind the fence” is an adjective phrase modifying the noun “cow.” (For more information on adjectives, see the previous page.)

Adjectives and Adverbs

Infinitive phrases such as “to make” and “to be” can be adverbs, adjectives, or nouns.

(adv) *I tried to show her a better system.* (Modifies the verb “tried”)

(adj) *To make a lot of money, a person must work hard.* (Modifies the noun “person”)

(noun) *To be or not to be* is a good question. (Functions as the subject of the verb “is”)

Subordinate Clauses beginning with a Subordinating Conjunction are usually adverbs. (Adverb Clauses are in **bold** font.)

After the cow walked away, the calf began crying. (Modifies the verb “began crying”)

The dog snarled viciously **because it had rabies.** (Modifies the verb “snarled”)

When the woman won the lottery, she lost her mind. (Modifies the verb “lost”)

Adjectives and Adverbs Comparative and Superlative Forms (Degree)

A characteristic adjectives and adverbs share is that they can describe degree. For example: A girl is **pretty**. She can also be **prettier** than her sister, or maybe she is the **prettiest** girl in the world. She may even be considered **beautiful, more beautiful** than her sister or the **most beautiful** girl in the world. When to use “er” or “est” endings and when to use “more” or “most” is sometimes confusing to students; however, learning three very simple rules should end the confusion.

Rule #1: Short words of one or two syllables, such as “pretty” take an ending; on the other hand, longer words of three or more syllables, such as “beautiful” and “ly” adverbs such as “slowly,” use “more” or “most.” For example, “more slowly” “more beautiful.”

Rule #2: Use “er” or “more” to compare two, and use “est” or “most” to compare more than two. “*Prettier of the three*” is never okay; neither is “*prettiest of the two.*”

Rule #3: Never use more than one form of comparison. In other words, use either “er” or “more.” Never ever use both. “*More prettier*” is never okay.

Write the Comparative and Superlative Forms for the following words (The first two have been done for you)

Base Form	Comparative Form	Superlative Form
Cute	Cuter	Cutest
Intelligent	More intelligent	Most intelligent
Mean		
spiteful		
highly		
happy		

Two words that do not follow the formula above are “good” and “bad.” The comparative and superlative forms of these words are as follows:

Base Form	Comparative Form	Superlative Form
Good	Better	Best
Bad	Worse	Worst