THE ROLE OF ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Adjectives and adverbs are parts of speech and are used to provide additional information about other words. Adjectives and adverbs are also known as content words because they provide important information in sentences. Sometimes students are not sure when to use an adverb or an adjective. This short guide provides an overview and rules for using both adjectives and adverbs.

Adjectives. Adjectives modify nouns and can be used a few different ways in a sentence. In their simplest form, they are placed directly before a noun:

1. *Tom is an excellent singer.*
2. *I bought a comfortable chair.*
3. *She's thinking about buying a new house.*

Adjectives are also used in simple sentences with the verb "to be." In this case, the adjective describes the subject of the sentence:

1. *Jack is happy.*
2. *Peter was very tired.*
3. *Mary'll be excited when you tell her.*

Adjectives are used with sense verbs or verbs of appearance (feel, taste, smell, sound, appear and seem) to modify the noun which comes before the verb:

1. *The fish tasted awful.*
2. *Did you see Peter? He seemed very upset.*
3. *I'm afraid the meat smelled rotten.*

Adverbs. Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. They are easily recognized because they end in "ly." They are often used at the end of a sentence to modify the verb:

a) *Jack drove carelessly.*
b) *Tom played the match effortlessly.*
c) *Jason complained about his classes constantly.*

Adverbs are used to modify adjectives:

• They seemed extremely satisfied.
• She paid increasingly high prices.

Adverbs are also used to modify other adverbs:

• The people in the line moved incredibly quickly.
• She wrote the report unusually neatly.

Confusing Adjectives and Adverbs

As you may have noticed, adverbs often end in "ly". In fact, you can often change an adjective into an adverb by simply adding "ly." (For example: slow/slowly, careful/carefully, patient/patiently.) However, there are a number of adjectives that also end in "ly," which can be confusing. For example:

• It was a chilly afternoon in the country.
• Alice has curly red hair.

• There are many friendly people in Portland.

• What a lovely surprise to see you again!

Adjectives and Adverbs With the Same Form

There are a number of adjectives and adverbs that have the same form, which can confuse non-native English speakers. The two most common are "hard" and "fast." Other words that can function as both adverbs and adjectives include "easy," "fair," and "just."

• Adjective: She had a hard time at school.

• Adverb: She works very hard at her job.

• Adjective: He said it was an easy test.

• Adverb: Please take it easy and relax.

• Adjective: He is a just man.

• Adverb: I just missed the bus.

Adjectives and adverbs are both words that **describe** something. If anyone has ever asked you to describe something in detail, you probably used some adverbs and adjectives along the way. But it can be easy to mix them up and forget which is which, so it's important to know how each one is used. An adjective is a word that **describes a noun**. In other words, it tells us more about a particular person, place, or thing. Adjectives also make it easy to understand **which thing** you're talking about. In the example above, the word **pink** describes **a particular cupcake**. So **pink** is an adjective. If one cupcake was larger than the others, we could have said it was the **big** cupcake.

An adverb is a word that **describes a verb**. Just like adjectives, adverbs are used to add detail to a sentence. More specifically, adverbs tell us **how**, **when**, or **where** something happened. In the example above, the word **deeply** describes **how he**

was staring, so deeply is an adverb. In this sentence, it means he was staring in a deep way. If his staring had been weird, we could have said he was staring **weirdly**.

Using adjectives and adverbs

You know adjectives and adverbs are both words that describe something. But for many people, these words are also easy to mix up. Thankfully, there are some simple rules that will help you know which is which and when to use them.

Look at the context

If you're not sure whether to use an adverb or an adjective, try to figure out what you're describing. Remember, adjectives are used to describe nouns, which means they can explain **what kind** of thing you have, **how many** things you have, or **which thing** you're talking about. Adverbs, on the other hand, are used to describe verbs, which means they can explain **how** something happened, **when** something happened, or **where** something happened.

Look at the ending

You might have already noticed that many adverbs end with the letters **ly**. If you see a word that ends in **ly**, there's a good chance it's an adverb, not an adjective. Can you use this rule to tell what's wrong with this sentence? Because it doesn't have an **ly** ending, you might have guessed that **quick** is an adjective. However, this sentence is incorrect because an adjective can't be used to describe a verb (**drove**). To make this sentence correct, we could change the adjective to an adverb: He drove **quickly**. Now the sentence describes how he was driving.

Look at the placement

Here's an easy way to know where to put an adjective in a sentence. It will usually appear just **before** the noun it's

describing. By contrast, an adverb will usually appear right **after** the verb it's
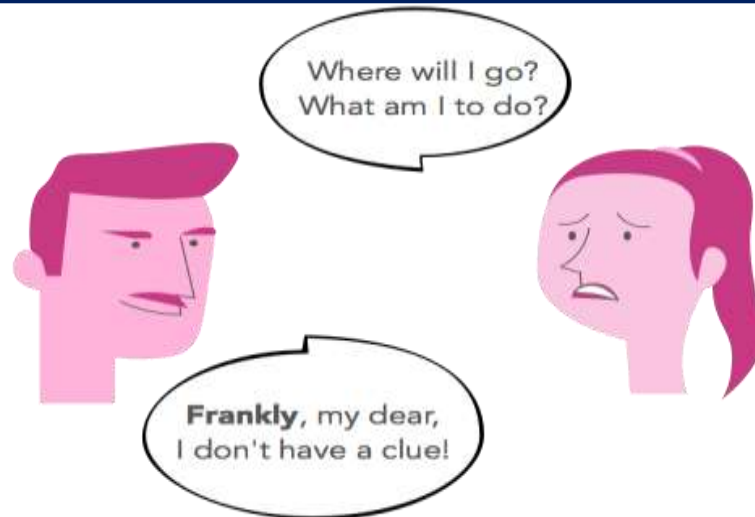
describing.

Unfortunately, placement doesn't **always** tell you if something is an adverb or adjective. For example,

is **sassy** an adjective or adverb in the image below?

Even though it's right next to a verb (**is**), **sassy** is an adjective because it describes the magician. And while adjectives are usually close to the words

they describe, adverbs can move around more freely in a sentence. For example, you might see an adverb at the beginning of a sentence.

Here, **frankly** is an adverb, but it doesn't describe any specific verb in the sentence. Instead, it means the entire sentence will be spoken in a frank, or direct, way. If he was more optimistic, he might have said, **Hopefully, it will all work out**. Use the techniques you just learned and see if you can pick out the adjectives and adverbs below.

Suddenly, the girls realized their **big** mistake. They had **foolishly** made their cakes too **small**. They had to do something **fast**!

Adverb! Even though this word comes before the verb it describes, it still tells us how they made their cakes. The LY ending is another clue that this is an adverb.

Common adverbs and adjectives A lot of adjectives and adverbs are actually based on the same word, which is one reason they're sometimes difficult to tell

apart. Here's a list of the adjectives and adverbs you'll see the most: You can also place an adverb between the word **to** and a verb. This is called a **split infinitive**. In the past, this was considered a serious grammatical error, but it's commonly used and accepted today.

Adjectives and **Adverbs** are both **modifiers**. In other words, they describe

things. If you want to tell us a good story or discuss something in detail, you'll have to use lots of adverbs and adjectives. But, because they both help us to describe things, it is very easy to confuse them. Let's take a close look at how to use them.

Why is it important to know the differences? With many words in English, there are multiple forms. The forms depend on whether we're using the word as a noun, adjective or adverb. So it is important to know what you're describing in order to use the right form. Look at the table below to see examples of a few words in their various forms.

Noun	Ajective	Adverb
anxiety	anxious	anxiously
energy	energetic	energetically
intelligence	intelligent	intelligently

Adjectives	Adverbs
Good	Well
Clear	Clearly
Most	Mostly
Real	Really
Late	Lately
Hard	Hardly
Easy	Easily
Quick	Quickly
Slow	Slowly
Hope	Hopefully

More common adverbs and adjectives

The fact that many adverbs can be used in more than one of these functions can confuse the issue, and it may seem like splitting hairs to say . that a single adverb is really two or more words that serve different functions However, this distinction can be useful, especially when considering adverbs like naturally that have different meanings in their different functions. Rodney Huddleston distinguishes between a word and a lexicogrammatical-word.

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