

LESSON 27

Adjectives and Adverbs: Choosing the Correct Modifier

Adjectives and adverbs—two kinds of **modifiers**—add meaning to nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs.

An **adjective** modifies a noun or pronoun. An **adverb** modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb.

EXAMPLES

adjective Uncle Sam, a symbol of the United States, is a **white-bearded** man with a **star-spangled** top hat and vest. (*White-bearded* modifies the noun *man*; *star-spangled* modifies the nouns *top hat* and *vest*.)

adverb Thomas Nast, a political cartoonist, created the image **soon** after the Civil War. (*Soon* modifies the verb *created*.)

To determine whether a modifier is an adjective or an adverb, you can follow these steps.

1. Look at the word that is modified.
2. Ask yourself, “Is this modified word a noun or a pronoun?” If the answer is *yes*, the modifier is an adjective. If the answer is *no*, the modifier is an adverb.

In the following example, the word *daffodils* is modified by the word *yellow*. The word *daffodils* is a noun, so the word *yellow* is an adjective.

EXAMPLE

Yellow daffodils opened in the sun.

In the next example, the word *stood* is modified by the word *shakily*. The word *stood* is a verb. Therefore, the word *shakily* is an adverb.

EXAMPLE

The fawn **stood shakily** on thin legs.

EXERCISE 1

Identifying Adjectives and Adverbs in Literature

Read the following literature passage and then identify each of the underlined words in the literature passage as either an adjective or adverb. Write your answers on the corresponding lines.

Ptolemy, a ¹Greek astronomer who was born about 100 AD, led the attack on Aristarchus's theories. "If the Earth ²actually rotated to the east," reasoned Ptolemy, "wouldn't winds always blow ³westward and clouds always move westward?" Ptolemy became the ⁴most ⁵famous spokesman for the ⁶false idea that the Earth stands still and is the center of the Universe, a theory that became known as the "Ptolemaic System." Its followers, called "Ptolemaists," developed ⁷numerous arguments to explain why the Earth couldn't ⁸possibly spin. One was that a ⁹spinning Earth would make us feel ¹⁰constantly dizzy. They also argued that if the Earth ¹¹really rotated, a rock or ball hurled into the sky would be left far ¹²behind rather than coming down near where it was thrown.

*from "The Five 'Wanderers' of the Ancient Skies," page 378
Dennis Brindell Fradin*

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 10. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 11. _____ |
| 6. _____ | 12. _____ |

EXERCISE 2

Using Adjectives and Adverbs in Your Writing

For a nature magazine read by students, write a short paragraph describing the appearance and activities of a mammal, bird, or insect. Use adjectives and adverbs in your paragraph to help your reader visualize what the creature looks like and how it acts.

Adjectives

Adjectives modify nouns by telling specific details about them.

EXAMPLES

noun	a tree
a little more specific	a gnarled tree
more specific yet	an old, gnarled tree
even more specific	an old, gnarled apple tree

The articles *a*, *an*, and *the* are the most common adjectives. *A* and *an* refer to any person, place, idea, or thing in general. *The* refers to a specific person, place, idea, or thing.

EXAMPLES

Would you like **a** peach or would you prefer **a** pear? (*A* refers to any peach or pear.)

The vase on **the** table is new. (*The* refers to a specific vase on a specific table.)

Adjectives usually come before the words they modify, but they may also follow linking verbs.

EXAMPLES

preceding noun The **old, gnarled** tree was struck by lightning.

following linking verb The tree was **old and gnarled**.

Some adjectives tell *how many* or *what kind* about the nouns or pronouns they modify; nouns and pronouns tell us *who* or *what*.

EXAMPLES

Some children wore **colorful wool** scarves.

Sheila got **fuzzy angora** mittens for a present.

Other adjectives tell *which one* or *which ones*.

EXAMPLES

Their well has gone dry.

Those insects can be very destructive.

Some possessive nouns act as adjectives.

EXAMPLE

Angela's shoes were red and white.

EXERCISE 3

Identifying Adjectives in Literature

First read the passage below, and then identify the fifteen adjectives it contains. Include articles. Tell which noun or pronoun each adjective modifies. Note that there might be more than one adjective modifying a noun. List these adjectives together.

Peanuts' bright eyes peered at me through a latticework of vegetation as he began his strutting, swaggering approach. Suddenly he was at my side and sat down to watch my "feeding" techniques as if it were my turn to entertain him. When Peanuts seemed bored with the "feeding" routine, I scratched my head, and almost immediately, he began scratching his own...

*from "Gorillas in the Mist," page 419
Dian Fossey*

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

EXERCISE 4

Understanding Adjectives

Rewrite each of the sentences below, replacing general, overused adjectives with more colorful and precise choices or adding adjectives that enliven the sentences.

1. Nice flowers grew in the garden.

2. The pretty woman sang to the baby.

3. The big truck squealed to a stop.

4. The animal was large.

5. The young boy jumped for the ball.

6. The tall building stood at the edge of the property.

7. He baked a good cake.

8. Grandmother wore an old hat.

9. The sky turned a dark color.

10. Their idea sounds okay.

EXERCISE 5

Using Adjectives in Your Writing

For a school newspaper, write a paragraph about a visit to the doctor or dentist. You can present the experience either seriously or humorously, but be sure to use specific adjectives to help recreate for your readers what happened and how you felt about it.

Adverbs

Adverbs modify anything that isn't a *namer* (noun or pronoun). Adverbs can modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. Adverbs often tell *how, when, where, or to what extent*.

EXAMPLES

adverbs modify verbs

The cat nestled **contentedly** in my lap. (*Contentedly* tells how the cat nestled.)

The flounder **often** lies **flat** on the bottom of the ocean. (*Often* tells when they lie on the bottom; *flat* tells how they lie.)

adverbs modify adjectives

The raspberry iced tea tastes **somewhat** artificial. (*Somewhat* tells to what extent the iced tea tastes artificial.)

The alligator has an **extremely** muscular tail. (*Extremely* tells to what extent the tail is muscular.)

adverbs modify adverbs

The scene changes were made **very** quickly. (*Very* tells to what extent the scene changes were made quickly.)

Vampire bats are **most** likely to avoid predators such as owls. (*Most* tells how likely vampire bats are to avoid predators.)

Many adverbs are formed by adding *-ly* to adjectives, such as *rapidly, luckily, badly, and strangely*. Note, though, that you cannot depend on *-ly* to identify adverbs, since some adjectives have the same ending, as in *fatherly, lonely, cowardly, and silly*. Also, many common adverbs do not have a consistent ending, such as *always, forever, here, not, now, and far*. The only sure way to distinguish between adjectives and adverbs is to determine how each individual word functions in its sentence.

EXERCISE 6

Identifying Adjectives and Adverbs in Literature

Identify each underlined word in the passage below as an adjective or adverb.

"Ooh, offshores—" writes Reno Abbellira, "where wind and wave ¹most ²often form that ³terminal rendezvous of love—when the wave can reveal her ⁴deepest longings, her crest caressed, ⁵cannily covered to form those peeling concavities we know, perhaps a bit ⁶irreverently, as tubes. Here we strive to spend ⁷every second—enclosed, encased, sometimes ⁸fatefully entombed, and hopefully, gleefully ejected—Whoosh!"

from "A Sea Worry," page 414
Maxine Hong Kingston

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

EXERCISE 7

Identifying Adverbs

Identify each adverb in the following sentences, and tell whether it modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb.

1. Ancient Polynesians ingeniously invented surfing on the islands of Tahiti and Hawaii.

2. Since surfing is an activity done only in the water, it makes sense that the sport was created on islands.

3. Surfing almost completely disappeared when Americans and Europeans immigrated to the islands.

4. Surfing is a very challenging sport and it takes a lot of practice.

5. By the 1960s, a new surfing culture actually emerged in California and Hawaii.

6. If you are looking for some excitement, surfing is one of the most exhilarating sports.

7. It can also be very dangerous, so be careful.

8. Taking surfing lessons is probably a good idea if you want to learn.
