

ADJECTIVES

Introduction

Henry and Claire are having dinner in a quiet restaurant. It's a **warm** evening. The food is **delicious**.

An adjective is a word like quiet, warm, delicious. The word quiet describes the restaurant. It tells us what the restaurant is like.

1. What is an adjective ?

An adjective is a word that describes a person, a thing, or a place which a noun refers to. Adjectives can give us information about:

Size: large windows; a big car.

Age: a new theory; an old nation.

Shape: a square box; a round table.

Colour: blue eyes.

Origin: an Algerian woman.

Some adjectives can be identified by their endings; typical adjective endings include:

-able/ible achievable, capable, illegible

-al logical, internal, functional

-ful beautiful, careful, grateful

-ic terrific, fantastic

-ive attractive, inventive, persuasive

-less restless, careless, breathless

-ous courageous, disastrous, dangerous

However, a large number of common adjectives can not be identified in this way; they do not have a typical adjectival form: bad, distant, elementary, quiet, bright, red, good, cold, silent, simple, honest, strange, dark, great...etc.

2 Types of Adjectives

2.1 Gradable Vs Ungradable Adjectives

Gradable adjectives can be used with adverbs such as very or extremely to say that a thing or person has more or less of a particular quality. In other words, the modifying word (adverb) locates the adjective on a scale of comparison, at a position higher or lower than the one indicated by the adjective alone. This is what is known as *gradability*. Note that the comparative and the superlative forms can be formed from the absolute form of any gradable adjective.

big	bigger	biggest
careful	more careful	most careful

The lowest point on the scale of comparison is called the absolute form; the middle point is known as the comparative form, and the highest point is known as the superlative form.

Most adjectives are gradable, yet if the adjective already denotes the highest position on a scale, then it is ungradable. Ungradable adjectives themselves imply 'to a large degree' and are seldom used with adverbs such as *very* or *extremely*. Instead, we can use adverbs such as *absolutely* or *totally*. Note that ungradable adjectives do not have comparative and superlative forms.

<i>adverbs</i>	extremely, fairly, immensely, pretty (informal), really, slightly, very	deeply, hugely, rather, reasonably,	angry, big, busy, comfortable, common, happy, important, quiet, rich, strong, young	<i>gradable adjectives</i>
<i>adverbs</i>	absolutely, completely, entirely, pretty, really, simply, totally, utterly		amazed, awful, dreadful, furious, huge, impossible, invaluable, terrible, wonderful, useless	<i>ungradable adjectives</i>

- Our teacher gave us a **completely impossible** problem to solve.
- She was **extremely rich**.

Note: Notice that not all the adverbs given can go with all the adjectives given. For example, we wouldn't usually say 'completely essential'. Really and pretty can be used with both gradable and ungradable adjectives.

2.2 Attributive Vs Predicative Adjectives

An adjective is attributive or used attributively when it comes before the noun it describes and, therefore, is part of the noun phrase.

- The **hot sun** beat down on us all day.
- The **high price** surprised him.

An adjective is predicative or used predicatively when it comes after a linking verb (to be, appear, look, become, sound, taste, smell,...etc). In this case, the adjective functions as a subject complement on its own.

- The sun **was hot**. → hot: predicative adj/subj.complement
- The price **seemed high**.

Note: Consider the following example:

- He is an old man.

Old is an attributive adjective, not a predicative adjective; it does not function as a subject complement on its own. It is the whole NP “an old man” which functions as a subj.complement.

3 Special Cases of Adjectives

3.1 Participle Adjectives

Some present participles (-ing forms) and past participles (-ed forms) of verbs can be used as adjectives. Most of these participle adjectives can be used before the noun they describe or following linking verbs.

- She gave me a **welcoming cup** of tea.
- I found this **broken plate** in the kitchen cupboard.
- The students' tests results **were pleasing**.
- My mother **appeared delighted** with the present.

Many adjectives end in **-ing** and **-ed**, for example: **boring** and **bored**.

Remember the differences between the following pairs of adjectives: alarmed - alarming, amazed - amazing, bored - boring, excited - exciting, frightened - frightening, pleased - pleasing, surprised - surprising, tired - tiring, worried - worrying. When we use these adjectives to describe how someone feels about something, the -ing adjectives describe the 'something' (e.g. a surprising decision) and the -ed adjectives describe the 'someone' (e.g. I was surprised).

Compare adjectives ending in -ing and -ed:

- My job is *tiring*.

- My job is *satisfying*.

In these examples, the -ing adjective tells you about the job.

- I get very *tired* doing my job.

- I'm not *satisfied* with my job.

In these examples, the -ed adjective tells you how somebody feels (about the job).

3.2 Nouns Behaving like Adjectives

In English, many names of materials, substances, and nouns indicating use or purpose look like adjectives.

- a **cotton** dress

- a **kitchen** chair

- a **plastic** box

They remain nouns, as far as their form is concerned, having the function of adjectives.

4 The Order of Adjectives

In English, it is common to use more than one adjective before a noun:

- My brother lives in *a nice new house*.

- In the kitchen there was *a beautiful large round wooden table*.

Adjectives like new/large/round/wooden are fact adjectives. They give us information about age, size, colour etc.

Adjectives like nice/beautiful are opinion adjectives. They tell us what the speaker thinks of something or somebody.

Opinion adjectives usually go before fact adjectives.

	<i>opinion</i>	<i>fact</i>	
a	nice	long	summer holiday
an	interesting	young	man
	delicious	hot	vegetable soup
a	beautiful	large round wooden	table

When we use more than one adjective before a noun, there is often a preferred order for these adjectives. However, this order is not fixed: **opinion + size/physical quality/shape/age + colour + participle adjectives + origin + material + type + purpose + noun**.

an old plastic container	(= age + material + noun)
a hard red ball	(= quality + colour + noun)
a frightening Korean mask	(= opinion + origin + noun)
a round biscuit tin	(= shape + purpose (for holding biscuits) + noun)

Notes:

1. To help you to learn this order, it can be useful to remember that gradable adjectives (describing opinion, size, quality, shape, and age) usually precede ungradable adjectives (participle adjective and adjectives describing origin, material, type and purpose).

2. As far as nouns behaving like adjs, nouns indicating material precede those indicating purpose.

- A *cotton summer* dress

- A *teak kitchen* cupboard

3. When there are two or more colour adjectives, we use and:

- a **black and white** dress

- a **red, white and green** flag

Note: This does not usually happen with other adjectives before a noun:

- a long black dress (not a long and black dress)

5 The Comparison of Adjectives

5.1 Comparing Short Adjectives

A short adjective is composed of one syllable and not more than two.

➤ One-syllable adjectives form their comparatives and superlatives by adding –er and –est to the absolute form.

- clean cleaner the cleanest
- bright brighter the brightest

➤ Two-syllable adjs ending in –y or –er or –ly form their comparatives and superlatives by adding –er and –est to the absolute form.

- pretty prettier the prettiest
- clever cleverer the cleverest
- holy holier the holiest

Note: Certain one syllable adjectives have the form of consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC); these adjs form their comparatives and superlatives by adding –er and –est after doubling the last consonant.

- fat fatter the fattest

Other examples: *big, sad, thin,* and *wet.*

5.2 Comparing Long Adjectives

A long adjective is composed of three or more than three syllables.

Long adjs form their comparative and superlative forms through the addition of more/less and the most/the least to the absolute form.

- difficult more/less difficult the most/the least difficult
- comfortable more/less comfortable the most/the least comfortable

Note: Two-syllable adjs which do not end in –y or –er or –ly form their comparatives and superlatives by adding more/less and the most/the least to the absolute form.

- honest more/less honest the most/the least honest
- modern more/less modern the most/the least modern

Irregular Comparatives and Superlatives

Absolute form	Comparative form	Superlative form
good	better	the best
bad	worse	the worst
far	farther/further	the farthest/the furthest
old	older/elder	the oldest/the eldest

Exercises

1. Are the underlined adjectives gradable or ungradable? Suggest an appropriate adverb to complete each sentence. Try to use a different adverb each time.

- 1 The play was _____ marvellous.
- 2 The answer is _____ simple.
- 3 His new flat is _____ enormous.
- 4 He was _____ devastated by the news.
- 5 The instructions were _____ complicated.
- 6 The answer was _____ absurd.
- 7 I was _____ disappointed.
- 8 The questions were _____ hard.
- 9 Her books are _____ popular.
- 10 I was _____ terrified by the film.
- 11 He's a(n) _____ successful artist.
- 12 He's a(n) _____ essential member of the team.

2 Complete the sentences for each situation. Use the word in brackets + -ing or -ed.

- 1 The movie wasn't as good as we had expected. (disappoint...)
 a The movie was _____.
 b We were _____ with the movie.
- 2 Donna teaches young children. It's a very hard job, but she enjoys it. (exhaust...)
 a She enjoys her job, but it's often _____.
 b At the end of a day's work, she is often _____.
- 3 It's been raining all day. I hate this weather. (depress...)
 a This weather is _____.
 b This weather makes me _____.
 c It's silly to get _____ because of the weather.
- 4 Clare is going to Mexico next month. She's never been there before. (excit...)
 a It will be an _____ experience for her.
 b Going to new places is always _____.
 c She is really _____ about going to Mexico.

3 Choose the correct word.

- 1 I was disappointing / disappointed with the movie. I had expected it to be better.
 2 I'm not particularly interesting / interested in football.
 3 The new project sounds exciting / excited. I'm looking forward to working on it.
 4 It can be embarrassing / embarrassed when you have to ask people for money.
 5 Do you easily get embarrassing / embarrassed?
 6 I'd never expected to get the job. I was amazing / amazed when I was offered it.
 7 She's learnt very fast. She's made amazing / amazed progress.
 8 I didn't find the situation funny. I was not amusing / amused.
 9 I'm interesting / interested in joining the club. How much does it cost?
 10 It was a really terrifying / terrified experience. Everybody was very shocking / shocked.
 11 Why do you always look so boring / bored? Is your life really so boring / bored?
 12 He's one of the most boring / bored people I've ever met. He never stops talking, and he never says anything interesting / interested.

4 Put the adjectives in brackets in the correct position.

- 1 a beautiful table (wooden / round) _____
 2 an unusual ring (gold) _____
 3 an old house (beautiful) _____
 4 red gloves (leather) _____
 5 an American film (old) _____
 6 pink flowers (tiny) _____
 7 a long face (thin) _____
 8 big clouds (black) _____
 9 a sunny day (lovely) _____
 10 an ugly dress (yellow) _____
 11 a wide avenue (long) _____
 12 important ideas (new) _____
 13 a new sweater (green / nice) _____
 14 a metal box (black / small) _____
 15 long hair (black / beautiful) _____
 16 an old painting (interesting / French) _____
 17 a large umbrella (red / yellow) _____
 18 a big cat (black / white / fat) _____

5 Put the adjectives in brackets in these sentences in the most appropriate order.

- 1 Mine's the car. (blue, Japanese, small)
- 2 I rent a(n) house. (furnished, large, old)
- 3 I've just bought a table. (beautiful, coffee, wooden)
- 4 Their forces soon overcame the invasion. (combined, military, powerful)
- 5 Have you seen this invention? (fantastic, German, new)
- 6 There was a rug on the floor. (soft, wonderful, woollen)
- 7 She gave me a box. (jewellery, metal, small, square)

6 Read the situations and complete the sentences. Use a comparative form (-er or more ...).

- 1 Yesterday the temperature was six degrees. Today it's only three degrees.
It's it was yesterday.
- 2 Dan and I went for a run. I ran ten kilometres. Dan stopped after eight kilometres.
I ran Dan.
- 3 The journey takes four hours by car and five hours by train.
The journey takes train car.
- 4 I expected my friends to arrive at about 4 o'clock. In fact they arrived at 2.30.
My friends I expected.
- 5 There is always a lot of traffic here, but today the traffic is really bad.
The traffic today usual.

7 Complete the sentences. Use a superlative (-est or most ...) or a comparative (-er or more ...).

- 1 We stayed at hotel in the town. (cheap)
- 2 Our hotel was than all the others in the town. (cheap)
- 3 I wasn't feeling well yesterday, but I feel a bit today. (good)
- 4 What's thing you've ever bought? (expensive)
- 5 I prefer this chair to the other one. It's (comfortable)
- 6 Amy and Ben have three daughters. is 14 years old. (old)
- 7 Who is the person you know? (old)
- 8 What's way to get to the station? (quick)
- 9 Which is – the bus or the train? (quick)
- 10 I can remember when I was three years old. It's memory. (early)
- 11 Everest is mountain in the world. It is than any other mountain. (high)
- 12 a: This knife isn't very sharp. Do you have a one?
B: No, it's one I have. (sharp)

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