

# Chapter 10

## *Adjectives*

An *adjective* is a word that gives you extra information about a *noun* or a *pronoun*. Here's an example sentence:

Sally hit the **green** ball.

Noun  
Adjective

The adjective 'green' tells us some extra information about the noun 'ball'. This is probably the most common position you'll find an adjective in – just before the noun it's describing. Of course, it can also be placed in different positions in a sentence, like this:

Tyrannosaurus Rex was **large**.

In this sentence, the noun is 'Tyrannosaurus Rex'. The adjective describing T-Rex is 'large', which comes later in the sentence. The verb 'was' is a *linking verb* that connects the subject of the sentence 'Tyrannosaurus Rex' with the subject complement, in this case, the adjective 'large'.

### **Adding adverbs on top of an adjective**

Sometimes you can see a noun with a whole lot of words just before it that describe it. You can pile *adverbs* on top of adjectives that already describe a noun, like in this sentence:

I don't like eating *quickly* **cooked** meals.  
Adjective  
Adverb

The adjective 'cooked' in this sentence is used to tell us extra information about what type of meals I don't like eating. But, on top of that, the *adverb* 'quickly' is used to add extra information about the *adjective itself*. How fast are the meals cooked that I don't like? They are cooked 'quickly'.

## SECTION 10.2 - ADJECTIVE TYPES

### Demonstrative adjectives

*Demonstrative adjectives* are what you might use when you're in a shop with a friend buying some new clothes. After looking at a few shirts you might say something like this to your friend:

I like **this** shirt, but you like **that** shirt better don't you?

Probably this sentence would be accompanied by you pointing at the shirt that you like and then at the shirt that you think your friend likes – that's why they're *demonstrative* adjectives. Other demonstrative adjectives include 'those' and 'these'.

These words are adjectives because they tell you extra information about the nouns in a sentence. You don't just like any random shirt, you like 'this' one.

### Possessive adjectives

Young kids use *possessive adjectives* all the time, although they probably don't realise it when they say:

That's **my** toy, Tommy!

'My' is known as a possessive adjective. It is an adjective because it adds some information about the noun 'toy' – it's not just any toy, it's 'my' toy.

A possessive adjective can also refer to an entire phrase (not just to a single noun), like in this case:

I try to eat **my** *five favourite foods* every week.  
Noun Phrase  
Possessive adjective

The possessive adjective is 'my'. It refers to the entire phrase 'five favourite foods'. When you put together the possessive adjective and the rest of the phrase you get

something known as a *noun phrase*. If you're trying to analyse the sentence, you could ask yourself something like:

Q: What am I talking about when I talk about 'my' in this sentence?

A: I am talking about my 'five favourite foods'.

In this case, because the verb 'to eat' is a *transitive verb* it takes an object that it acts on. In this sentence, the *object* of the verb is the entire noun phrase 'five favourite foods'. You could work this out by asking yourself a question like this:

Q: What am I trying to eat every week?

A: I am trying to eat my 'five favourite foods'.

## Questioning or interrogative adjectives

When you ask a question you can use an *interrogative adjective* such as 'who' or 'what':

**What** golf club are you going to use for this shot?

So like any adjective, this one has to add extra information about a noun or a pronoun somewhere in the sentence. In this sentence, it's telling us extra information about the noun 'club', which already has one adjective 'golf' describing it. The verb in this sentence is 'to use', which is a transitive verb and needs an object to act on. The object of this verb is the noun phrase 'what golf club'.

## Indefinite adjectives

An *indefinite adjective* tells you some information about a noun without being exact in its description. Common indefinite adjectives are the words 'many', 'few', 'all' and 'some'. 'Many' means quite a few, but doesn't tell you exactly how many. 'All' tells you every single one, but once again doesn't tell you exactly how many this is. Here is an example of an indefinite adjective being used:

You can go on ahead, I'll just be a **few** more minutes.

## SECTION 10.3 - THE DEGREE OF AN ADJECTIVE

You can modify an adjective to change to what degree that adjective describes a noun or pronoun. Have a look at this sentence:

A bear is a large land animal, a rhino is larger, but the largest is the elephant.

In this sentence, different degrees of the adjective 'large' are used to make comparisons between the sizes of animals. All adjectives have their normal form, like 'large' or 'long'. This is known as the *positive* form of the adjective.

When you want to compare two things, like the size of a bear and a rhino, you can use the *comparative* degree of an adjective. The comparative form of 'large' is 'larger', so you could say something like:

A rhino is larger than a bear.

When you want to compare three or more things, however, you need to use the *superlative* form of an adjective – such as ‘largest’:

The elephant is the largest land animal.

In this sentence, the comparison is *implied* – it’s implied that I’m comparing the elephant to all other land animals.

A lot of adjectives form their comparative and superlative forms by adding ‘er’ and ‘est’ to the end of the normal adjective. However, there are some that are *irregular* and don’t follow any such rules:

Positive form	Comparative form	Superlative form
Some	More	Most
Bad	Worse	Worst
Old (as in people)	Older	Oldest
Good	Better	Best
Little (as in quantity)	Less	Least
Small (as in size)	Smaller	Smallest
Far	Further	Furthest

## Comparative and superlative degree for multi-syllable adjectives

When you’ve got an adjective that has more than one syllable, you usually can’t just add ‘er’ or ‘est’ to the end of it to form the comparative and superlative forms. It just doesn’t work:

Superficial, Superficialer, Superficialest



Luckily, in these situations there is an easy solution – just use the original adjective, but put ‘more’ or ‘most’ in front of it. You use ‘more’ to form the comparative form of the adjective and ‘most’ to form the superlative form of the adjective:

Amy is superficial, Pol is more superficial, but Linda is the most superficial.

## SECTION 10.4 - TALKING ABOUT QUANTITIES AND AMOUNTS

You can use adjectives to describe or compare how much there is of certain things, like comparing how much money people have, for instance. You might say something like:

Tom has **less** money than Bob.

The adjective 'less' is used to describe the noun 'money'. The other common adjective used to describe quantities and amounts is 'fewer':

Ever since we stopped advertising, there have been **fewer** customers.

There is often a lot of confusion about when to use the adjective 'less' and when to use 'fewer'. Well, there's a general rule, which goes like this:

- 'Fewer' is used when you're talking about quantities that you can count, like the number of coins you might have in your wallet.
- 'Less' is used when you're talking about quantities that you cannot easily count, like how much water you have in your glass.

Of course, there are exceptions to most rules. There are situations when you do need to use 'less', even when you're talking about something that you can count. Usually, this happens when you're talking about an actual number of something, like this:

It's **less** than 900 km to Sydney; you should be there in **less** than 9 hours.

Because we have two *numerical quantities* – '900 km' and '9 hours', we use the word 'less', *even though* we can count 900 and 9. But if you were talking about hours without mentioning specific amounts, you would use 'fewer':

You'll waste **fewer** hours if you drive to Sydney tomorrow.

Because this sentence isn't talking about a specific number of hours, and because the number of hours it takes to drive to Sydney is something you could count, use the adjective 'fewer'.

Another way of looking at it is to think about whether the thing you're talking about can be measured by counting. The amount of water you have in a cup can't be measured by counting (you'd have to use units of mL to describe it) so you use the adjective 'less'. But something like the number of people on the bus you catch can be counted – 23, or 46, for instance, so you use the adjective 'fewer'.

## SECTION 10.5 - THE OPPOSITE OF AN ADJECTIVE

The opposite of many adjectives is a completely different word, like these:

Good – evil

But you can get the opposite of some adjectives by using a *prefix* in front of the adjective. However, this is where it gets really really tricky. Two of the common prefixes used to get the opposite form of an adjective are ‘in’ and ‘un’, but there is no one set of rules that will work for every adjective. This is where it’s best to use a dictionary. It is however a good idea to learn some of the more common opposites for everyday use:

Possible	Impossible
Fortunate	Unfortunate
Flammable	Nonflammable
Important	Unimportant
Appropriate	Inappropriate
Lucky	Unlucky
Decent	Indecent

So you can see that some use ‘im’, some use ‘un’, some use ‘non’, and some use ‘mis’.

## Other ways to form the opposites of adjectives

A more general way of creating the opposite of an adjective is to use the word ‘least’ or ‘less’ before the adjective:

He is the **least** intelligent person in the meeting room.

This is not exactly the complete opposite of the word *intelligent* because we’re not saying he’s dumb. All we’re saying is that he’s not as smart as anyone else in the meeting room. It’s a way of creating the opposite meaning of an adjective for the purposes of comparison. It’s not quite as strong as using the actual opposite of an adjective.

Now, you’ve got two choices when you do this. You can use the *comparative form* ‘less’ or you can use the *superlative form* ‘least’. Use ‘less’ when you’re only comparing two things; use ‘least’ when you’re comparing three or more things:

He is **less** intelligent than Bob.

Mike is the **least** intelligent of the four.

You can use ‘less’ and ‘least’ when you want to *diplomatically* say that someone is bad at something, softening the statement’s impact somewhat so you don’t offend them. Compare these two sentences:

This one, which sounds pretty harsh:

Michael is the **stupidest** boy in his class.

And this one, which is not quite as harsh:

Michael is the least intelligent boy in his class.

Using the second sentence also allows the reader to interpret more. Say Michael's parents were reading this statement. They might think to themselves, "Well, the other boys in Michael's class are very intelligent." The first sentence, however, doesn't really leave much room for interpretation and is quite direct.

### Handy Hint #7 - 'Flammable' and 'inflammable'

Adding a prefix in front of an adjective does not always give it the opposite meaning. The best example of this is the words 'flammable' and 'inflammable', which mean *the same thing*. Most people see the 'in' in front of 'flammable' and automatically assume that the whole word means 'not flammable'. This is a logical thing to think since when it is applied to other words like 'decent' and 'indecent', you do have opposites.

However, in this case, the 'in' is a different 'in' to that in the word 'indecent'. It all goes back to how we got these words from Latin. To cut a long story short, *flammable* and *inflammable* mean the same thing. If you want a word for the opposite of *flammable*, use the word *nonflammable*.

### Difference between 'ed' and 'ing' at the end of an adjective

A small difference in the ending of an adjective can give the whole sentence a completely different meaning:

Sally is a very annoying person.

In this sentence, we're describing how Sally has a tendency to annoy other people.

Sally is a very annoyed person.

In this sentence however, we're talking about how Sally is *herself* very annoyed. The sentence has a totally different meaning to the first one, just by using 'ed' instead of 'ing' at the end of the adjective.

'Annoying' and 'annoyed' are actually *participles* – the *verb* 'annoy' has been changed into a participle by adding 'ed' or 'ing'. A participle does the same thing as an adjective – it's used to describe a noun or pronoun. Usually, the 'ed' participle means that the noun it's connected with is the *object* of the participle. For instance, in the second sentence, the adjective 'annoyed' is connected with the noun 'Sally'. The 'ed' in 'annoyed' means that Sally is the object – something has *annoyed her*.

When you have an 'ing' ending it usually means that the noun associated with the adjective is *doing* something, not having something done to it. For instance, in the first sentence, Sally is actively 'annoying' other people.

## Handy Hint #8 - Good versus evil well

'Good' is an *adjective*. 'Well' is an *adverb*. The misuse of these words is one of the most commonly corrected mistakes in English.

When you're describing how someone *does* something (i.e., describing an action – a verb) you need to use the adverb 'well':

I write English well. ✓

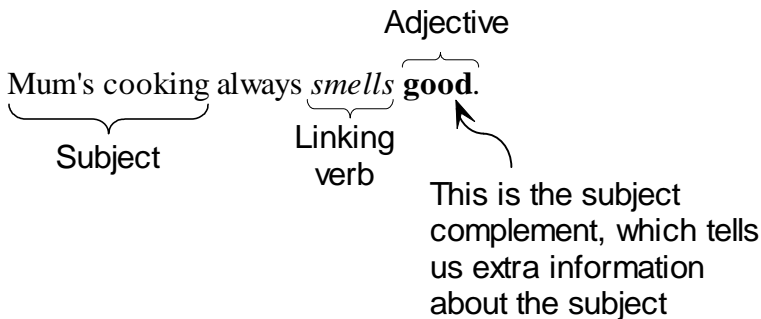
If you use 'good', it just doesn't work very well:

I write English good. ✗

When you are describing a *noun*, on the other hand, make sure you use the adjective 'good':

Brendan is a good boy. ✓

There is an exception to this rule – when you're using *linking verbs*. Remember that linking verbs connect a *subject* to the *subject complement*, which is a noun or an adjective that tells the reader some more information about the subject. When you're using a linking verb, you use the adjective 'good'. This makes sense, since the subject complement can only be a noun or an adjective, *not* an adverb like 'well'.



## Collective adjectives

By combining an adjective and the definite article 'the', you can create a noun, like this:

Robin Hood stole from the rich and gave to the poor.

By combining the definite article ‘the’ and the adjective ‘rich’, you create a phrase, which is effectively just a noun – ‘the rich’. Same with ‘the poor’.

So you use ‘the’ and an adjective to form a *collective noun*, as they’re known. If you use a verb with a collective noun, you need to use the *plural form* of the verb:

The poor were grateful to Robin Hood.

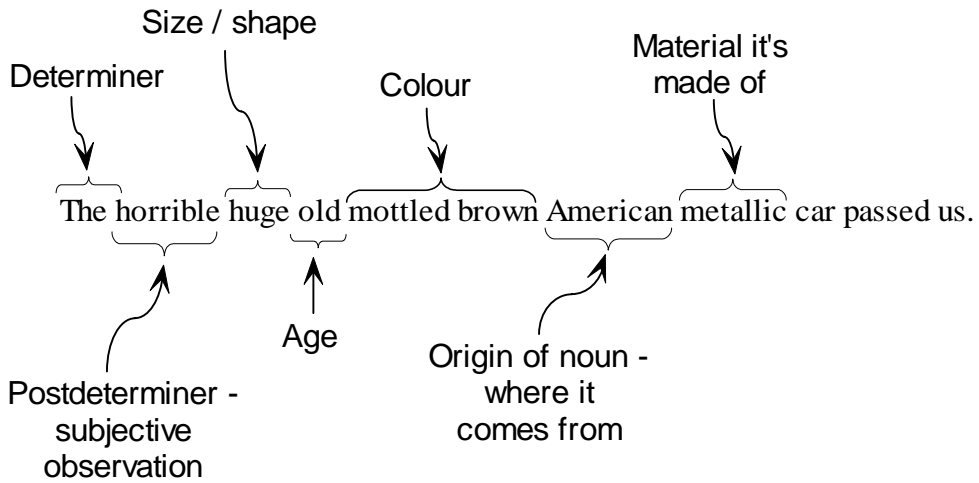
‘Were’ is a linking verb and is the *plural form* of the verb ‘was’.

## SECTION 10.6 - ORDERING MULTIPLE ADJECTIVES CORRECTLY

You can have more than one adjective describing the same noun, but, when you do, it’s important to write them in the appropriate *order*. Like for adverbs, there’s a convention about what order you should write adjectives in. If you don’t follow, a sentence often sounds quite strange. The order is:

- *Determiners* such as *articles* and *quantifiers*. For instance, ‘the’, ‘this’, ‘several’.
- Postdeterminers that are subjective (meaning open to opinion) *observations* about the noun; for instance, words like ‘horrible’, ‘engaging’, ‘reasonable’.
- Adjectives that describe the *shape* or *size* of something; for instance, ‘round’, ‘large’, ‘small’, ‘sharp’.
- Words that talk about how old the noun is – that indicate its *age* – such as ‘ancient’, ‘new’, ‘modern’.
- The *colour* of the noun, such as ‘purple’, ‘pink’, ‘red’, ‘blue’.
- Adjectives that tell you about *where the noun came from*; for example, a country like ‘Australian’, ‘British’, or a region like ‘subterranean’, ‘antipodean’.
- Words saying the material the noun is made from, such as ‘ceramic’, ‘wooden’, ‘foam’.

So to illustrate how to get this order right, here’s a very unlikely sentence:



## SECTION 10.7 - ARTICLES, DETERMINERS AND QUANTIFIERS

Sentences are often full of words like 'a' and 'the' and other little words that come before nouns – 'the dog', 'a cat'. These words are known as *determiners*. This section covers two types of determiners – *articles* and *quantifiers*.

### Articles

There are three words known as articles in the English language – 'a', 'an' and 'the'. An article is used when you want to point out a noun in a sentence. For instance, take a normal sentence like this:

Elephants walked through the trees.

You can use the article 'the' to highlight the noun 'elephants' to the reader, like this:

The elephants walked through the trees.

'The' is called the *definite article*, because you usually use it to point out a *specific* noun. Take the previous sentence – it's not just any bunch of elephants, it's *the* elephants.

'A' and 'an' are known as *indefinite articles*, because they aren't quite as specific as 'the' when you use them with a noun. The difference between 'a' and 'an' is that you use 'an' when it's just before a noun starting with a *vowel*, and 'a' in any other situation. For instance, if we go back to the elephant example:

An elephant walked through the trees.

The use of 'an' in this sentence isn't as *specific* as if we'd used 'the'. It's telling us is that some elephant walked through the trees, but it could be any elephant.

'A' and 'an' can only be used with *singular* nouns, but 'the' can be used with both

singular and plural nouns.

## Quantifiers

Quantifiers are words that tell you the amount of, how much, or how many you have of a noun. For instance:

I have a **lot of** cheese.

The quantifier ‘lot of’ tells us how much cheese I have.

There are three types of quantifiers:

1. quantifiers that only work with *countable nouns*,
2. quantifiers that only work with *non-countable nouns*, and
3. quantifiers that work with both.

A countable noun is something that you can count using whole numbers (for instance using the fingers of your hand). Examples of countable nouns are ‘dogs’, ‘cats’, ‘cakes’ and ‘eggs’. I could count how many of each of these I have using whole numbers – ‘5 dogs’, ‘23 cakes’, ‘12 eggs’ for instance.

A non-countable noun is the opposite of a countable noun – something you can’t easily count using whole numbers. A lot of *continuous* quantities are non-countable, such as how much water you have in a glass or how much exercise you did last night. You can’t say you did ‘5 exercise last night’ or that you have ‘7 water in my glass’.

Quantifiers like ‘few’, ‘several’, and ‘couple of’ work with *countable nouns*, like in these sentences:

I have a **few** tennis rackets.

Sally has a **couple of** tickets for the concert tonight.

Quantifiers like ‘a little’, ‘a bit of’, and ‘a large amount of’ work with *non-countable nouns*, like in these sentences:

I have a **large amount** of work to do this weekend.

Break me off a **bit of** chocolate please.

And then there are the quantifiers that can be used with either countable or non-countable nouns. Some of these include ‘a lot of’, ‘all of’, ‘most’, and ‘some’. Here’s an example of how they can be used both ways:

With a non-countable noun:

I have **some** work to do this weekend.

With a countable noun:

I have **some** assignments to do this weekend.

## Predeterminers

The ‘pre’ in most words means ‘before’, so a ‘pre’ + ‘determiner’ means something that comes *before* a determiner. One type of *predeterminer* is an *intensifier* that tells you

some extra information about the noun that comes after the determiner. The words ‘indeed’, ‘rather’, and ‘not really’ are examples of intensifiers. Here’s an example:

The soothsayer was **indeed** a fake.

The *predeterminer* ‘indeed’ comes *before* the *determiner* ‘a’, which comes before the *noun* ‘fake’. In this sentence, the *linking verb* ‘was’ connects the *subject* of the sentence ‘the soothsayer’ with the *subject complement* ‘fake’.

*Multipliers* and *fractional* expressions are also predeterminers that tell the reader some more information about the noun:

This toaster is **twice** the cost of the one in the other shop.

‘Twice’ is the *multiplicative predeterminer* and ‘the’ is the determiner. You can also have fractional predeterminers:

In the last run I did, I shaved **one-fourth of** an hour off my previous best time.

In this sentence, the *fractional predeterminer* is ‘one-fourth of’ and the determiner is ‘an’.