Adverbs

1. What are they?

Adverbs are words you can use to modify—to describe or add meaning to—other words. Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, and even whole clauses.

Adverbs can tell us how something is done, when it is done, and where it is done. Examples of some common adverbs are *really, quickly, especially, early, well, immediately, yesterday*.

Look at these examples:

* Alice smiled **sweetly**.

*The adverb ‘sweetly’ shows how (or in what manner) Alice smiled. It modifies the verb ‘smiled’.*

* The children were **really** happy when they were at the beach.

*The adverb ‘really’ says something about the children being happy. It modifies the adjective ‘happy’.*

* The data **clearly** show the correlation between weight of athletes and their speed.

*The adverb ‘clearly’ modifies the verb ‘show’ (to indicate the significance of the data).*

1. The form of many adverbs is **adjective + “ly”**:

rare + “ly” = rarely

successful + “ly” = successfully

perfect + “ly” = perfectly

Sometimes there are spelling changes:

tragic + “ly” = tragically

happy + “ly” = happily

comfortable + “ly” = comfortably

Some adverbs have the same form as the adjectives:

*hard, fast, late, straight, right, wrong, low, early, high*

While many adverbs do end with “–ly”, don’t take this for granted: some adverbs, like “almost” and “very” do not end this way, and some words that do end in “–ly”, like “lively”, “lovely” and “elderly” are actually **adjectives**.

Look at these examples:

* Malaysia is well-known for its **friendly** people. (Adjective ending with “–ly”)
* We were overwhelmed by the host’s **very** warm hospitality during our stay in Malaysia. (Adverb not ending with “–ly”)

1. Adjective or adverb?

Adjectives (quick / careful etc.) tell us about a *noun* (somebody or something). We use adjectives before nouns:

* Suzy is a careful driver. (not *a carefully driver)*
* We did not go out because of the heavy rain.

Adverbs (quickly / carefully etc.) tell us about a *verb* (*how* somebody does something or *how* something happens):

* Suzy drove carefully along the narrow road. (not *drove careful)*
* We did not go out because it was raining heavily. (not *raining heavy)*

Compare:

We also use adjectives after some verbs, especially **be**, and also **look**/**feel**/**sound** etc.

Compare:

1. We also use adverbs before *adjectives* and *other adverbs.* For example:

**reasonably** cheap (*adverb* + *adjective*)

**terribly** sorry (*adverb* + *adjective*)

**incredibly** quickly (*adverb* + *adverb*)

* It is a **reasonably cheap** restaurant and the food is **extremely good**.
* I am **terribly sorry**. I did not mean to push you. (not *terrible sorry*)
* Mariam learns language **incredibly quickly**.
* The exam was **surprisingly easy**.

You can also use an adverb before a *past participle* (**celebrated**/**organized**/**written** etc.**)**

* All festivals in Malaysia are **happily celebrated** together by all races.
* The conference was **successfully organized**.
* The lecturer finds his report **well written**.

1. Kinds of adverbs:

**Adverbs of time**

Adverbs of time answer the question ‘When?’. It is important to note that time adverbs are used in a number of adverb placements. Adverbs of time usually occurs at the end of a sentence or clause. Time adverbs are also used at the beginning of phrases to indicate when something should happen. Time adverbs are the most flexible of all adverbs in their adverb placement. Examples are *today, yesterday, now, before, daily, already, since, ago,* and *never.*

Examples:

* I met him *yesterday*.
* His father died two years *ago*.
* I have seen him *before*.
* They have *already* come.
* We will have to start *now*.
* Tomorrow Peter is going to visit his mother in Chicago.
* Sundays I like playing golf with my friends.
* Sometimes Jennifer enjoys a relaxing day at the beach.

**Adverbs of frequency**

Adverbs of frequency answer the question ‘How often?’. Adverbs of frequency are always placed before the main verb, rather than the auxiliary verb. Examples are *often, always, once, never, again, seldom* and *frequently.*

Examples:

* We *seldom* go out on Sundays.
* I have seen him only *once*.
* He called *again* this morning.
* We must *always* try to do our best.

**Adverbs of place**

Adverbs of place answer the question ‘Where?’. They tell us *where* something is done. They usually come after the verb and usually occurs at the end of a sentence or clause. Examples are *here, there, up, down, everywhere, out* and *in.*

Examples:

* He looked *up*.
* She came *here* a week ago.
* I searched for him *everywhere*.
* They were already *there* when I went in.

**Adverbs of manner**

Adverbs of manner answer the question ‘How?’ or ‘In what manner?’. Note that this class of adverb includes nearly all those adverbs ending in “-ly”. Examples are *carefully, quickly, sweetly, bravely, beautifully, well* and *fast.* Adverb placement of adverbs of manner usually occurs at the end of a sentence or clause.

Examples:

* The soldiers fought for their country *bravely*.
* This essay is written *well*.
* She walked *slowly*.
* The baby slept *soundly*.

**Adverbs of Degree**

Adverbs of degree tell us about the intensity or degree of an action, an adjective or another adverb. Common adverbs of degree:

*almost, nearly, quite, just, too, enough, hardly, scarcely, completely, very, extremely*.

Adverbs of degree such as *very, really and absolutely* change the strength of adjectives and adverbs:

*very cheap / very successfully.*

We use *absolutely* with adjectives that are already very strong. We say: *It was absolutely fantastic.* (not *It was absolutely good.*)

We use *very* with other adjectives:

* *It was very good.*
* *The children playing at the park are very happy.*

We use *really* with both types of adjective and before *very:*

* The professor finds his research methodology *really good*.
* The professor finds his research methodology *really very good*.
* The professor finds his research methodology *really fantastic*.

Adverbs of degree are usually placed:

* before the adjective or adverb they are modifying:

e.g. The water was extremely cold.

* before the main verb:

e.g. He was just leaving. She has almost finished.

Examples:

She doesn’t quite know what she’ll do after university.

They are completely exhausted from the trip.

I am too tired to go out tonight.

He hardly noticed what she was saying.

**Enough, very, too**

*Enough* as an adverb meaning ‘to the necessary degree’ goes after adjectives and adverbs.

Examples:

* Is your coffee hot enough? (adjective)
* He didn’t work hard enough. (adverb)

It also goes before nouns, and means ‘as much as is necessary’. In this case it is not an adverb, but a ‘determiner’.

Examples:

* We have enough bread.
* They don’t have enough food.

*Too* as an adverb meaning ‘more than is necessary or useful’ goes before adjectives and adverbs.

Examples:

* This coffee is too hot. (adjective)
* He works too hard. (adverb)

Enough and too with adjectives can be followed by ‘for someone/something’.

Examples:

* The dress was big enough for me.
* She’s not experienced enough for this job.
* The coffee was too hot for me.
* The dress was too small for her.

We can also use ‘to + infinitive’ after enough and too with adjectives/adverb.

Examples:

* The coffee was too hot to drink.
* He didn’t work hard enough to pass the exam.
* She’s not old enough to get married.
* You’re too young to have grandchildren!
* Very goes before an adverb or adjective to make it stronger.

Examples:

* The painting was very beautiful. (adjective)
* He worked very quickly. (adverb)

If we want to make a negative form of an adjective or adverb, we can use a word of opposite meaning, or not very.

Examples:

* The house was ugly

OR

* The house was not very beautiful
* He worked slowly

OR

* He didn’t work very quickly.

BE CAREFUL! There is a big difference between too and very.

Very expresses a fact:

* He speaks very quickly.

Too suggests there is a problem:

* He speaks too quickly (for me to understand).

**Other adverbs like very**

These common adverbs are used like very and not very, and are listed in order of strength, from positive to negative:

*extremely, especially, particularly, pretty, rather, quite, fairly, rather, not especially, not particularly*.

Note: rather can be positive or negative, depending on the adjective or adverb that follows:

Positive: The teacher was rather nice.

Negative: The film was rather disappointing.

Note on inversion with negative adverbs

Normally the subject goes before the verb:

SUBJECT VERB

I left

She goes

However, some negative adverbs can cause an inversion – the order is reversed and the verb goes before the subject:

Examples:

* I have never seen such courage.
* Never have I seen such courage.
* She rarely left the house.
* Rarely did she leave the house.

Negative inversion is used in writing, not in speaking.

Adverbs of degree are often **stressed** in spoken English:

*Did you see the match? It was* ***really*** *close, wasn’t it?*

**Note:**

Adverbs nearly always come after **be** and **auxiliary verbs:**

* Amanda **is** *always* serious with anything she reads.
* We **have** *already* seen her reactions.

If there are two or more adverbs at the end of a clause, the order can vary, but it is usually best to put a time adverb at the end:

* The played *happily* in the park *all day*.

(manner) (time)

1. **Adverb clauses of degree or comparison**

Adverb clauses of degree or comparison answer the question how much, how little or how many. The chief conjunctions used to introduce adverb clauses of degree are as, as…as, so…as and than.

* She is older than her husband.
* She is as intelligent as she is beautiful.
* You are later than I expected.
* She is as pretty as a doll.
* She is not so intelligent as her sister.

The correlative *the…the* may also be considered as a conjunction introducing adverb clauses of degree.

* The older you grow the wiser you become.
* The more he earns the more he spends.

Notes:

In adverb clauses of degree or comparison, the verb is often understood and not expressed.

* I earn as much as you (do).
* I can sing as well as he (does).
* She is as tall as he (is).
* Nobody knows her better than I (do).

Note that when the verb is not expressed it is more common to use object pronouns after as and than. Compare:

* I can sing as well as him.

OR

* I can sing as well as he does.

(More natural than ‘I can sing as well as he’.)

* Nobody knows her better than me.

OR

* Nobody knows her better than I do.

(More natural than ‘Nobody knows her better than I.)

1. **Placement of Adverbs**

Misplaced adverbs can cause confusion therefore adverbs need to be placed where the reader can clearly understand the meaning you intend. Adverbs are a bit more flexible, however. Both single-word and multiple-word adverb phrases can generally be placed either before or after the words they modify.

In the examples below, the adverbs and adverb phrases are underlined and the words they modify are in italics. For example:

* The lion *jumped* skilfully through the flaming hoop.
* The lion skilfully *jumped* through the flaming hoop.
* Before next Wednesday, *she* needed to cash her pay check.
* *She* needed to cash her pay check before next Wednesday.

1. **Comparatives and Superlatives**

Many adverbs have three forms: the normal form; the comparative form, which you can use to compare two things; and the superlative form, which you can use to compare three or more things. The following chart gives you some guidelines for forming the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Rules | Examples | | |
| Normal | Comparative | Superlative |
| **Short adverbs**   * Add “-er” for comparative * Add “-est” for superlative | soon  late  hard  fast  loud | sooner  later  harder  faster  louder | soonest  latest  hardest  fastest  loudest |
| ***Most longer adverbs ending in “-ly”:***   * Add “more” + adverb for comparative * Add “most” + adverb for superlative | slowly  easily  brightly  clearly  frequently | more slowly  more easily  more brightly  more clearly  more frequently | most slowly  most easily  most brightly  most clearly  most frequently |
| **Irregular adverbs** have special forms | well  badly  far | better  worse  further (or farther) | best  worst  furthest (or farthest) |

When using comparative and superlative forms, keep the following in mind:

* Many adverbs indicating time, place, and degree (i.e. tomorrow, here, totally) do not have comparative or superlative forms.
* Adjectives and adverbs that indicate an absolute or unchangeable quality should not be used with comparative and superlative constructions. Such absolute modifiers include words like final, main, impossible, perfect, unavoidable, unique.

1. Punctuating Adverbs

Place a comma at the end of an adverb phrase when it comes at the beginning of the sentence. For

example:

After some thought, she decided to buy her cousin’s used car.

PRACTICE

A) Identify the adjectives and adverbs in the following sentences by underlining the adjectives twice

and the adverbs once.

For example: The one-eyed green aliens stepped cautiously out of their spaceship.

1. Their timid leader tentatively put one fat, calloused foot on the grass.

2. She then gingerly placed the other foot down.

3. She paused, thoughtfully scratched her forehead, and then started to waddle quite gracelessly

toward a dim light.

4. Soon the braver aliens followed her but the more cowardly aliens hung back inside the door of the

silver spaceship.

5. Suddenly, they heard a short, high-pitched yelp.

6. The youngest alien had stepped accidentally on the tail of a small furry creature, and both of them

cried out instinctively.

7. The little alien regained his composure right away and, curious about the strange creature, he

carefully reached down to pick up the frightened mouse.

8. The mouse, still terrified, dashed away.

9. It ran over the sensitive toes of several aliens who squealed loudly

10.The resulting commotion distracted the group, and they didn’t notice the two young children slowly

riding up on their creaky three-speed bicycles.

PRACTICE

B) Create more detailed sentences by adding your own adjectives and adverbs to modify the words in

italics. For example:

 The star punched the photographer.

The reclusive movie star violently punched the pushy photographer.

1. The island was populated by birds that soared over the trees.

* The island was populated by birds that soared *gracefully* over the trees.

2. It was also populated by tourists who stayed at the resort and sat by the pool.

* It was also populated by tourists who *excitedly* stayed at the resort and *calmly* sat by the pool.

3. The man in a suit was reading a magazine on his morning commute to work.

* The man in a suit was reading a magazine *intently* on his morning commute to work.

4. The woman next to him sighed as the train stopped in a tunnel.

* The woman next to him sighed as the train *gradually* stopped in a tunnel

5. The neighbours gossiped about the people who lived in the house on the corner.

* The neighbours *quietly* gossiped about the people who *once* lived in the house on the corner.

6. UPS delivered packages to the back door and strangers in cars visited.

* UPS *carefully* delivered packages to the back door and strangers in cars visited

7. The students in the computer lab talked to each other and worked on their essays.

* The students in the computer lab *carefreely* talked to each other and *diligently* worked on their essays.

8. The tutor helped the boy with his homework.

* The tutor *patiently* helped the boy with his homework.

9. The children ate the ice cream.

* The children *delightfully* ate the ice cream.

10. A bully grabbed one of the cones and stuffed it in his mouth.

* A bully *rudely* grabbed one of the cones and stuffed it in his mouth.