**Adjectives**

An adjective is a [part of speech](https://www.thoughtco.com/part-of-speech-english-grammar-1691590) (or [word class](https://www.thoughtco.com/word-class-grammar-1692608)) that modifies a [noun](https://www.thoughtco.com/noun-in-grammar-1691442) or a [pronoun](https://www.thoughtco.com/pronoun-definition-1691685). In addition to their basic (or [positive](https://www.thoughtco.com/positive-degree-adjectives-and-adverbs-1691646)) forms (for example, *big* and *beautiful*), most adjectives have two other forms: [comparative](https://www.thoughtco.com/comparative-degree-adjectives-and-adverbs-1689881) (*bigger* and *more beautiful*) and [superlative](https://www.thoughtco.com/superlative-degree-adjectives-and-adverbs-1692162) (*biggest* and *most beautiful*). Adjectives often—but not always—serve as [modifiers](https://www.thoughtco.com/modifier-in-grammar-1691400), providing additional information about another word or word group, such as a noun or noun phrase. But adjectives can also themselves act as nouns in a sentence.

Learning a few basic grammatical rules and recognizing the various types of adjectives will have you correctly using these important parts of speech in no time. Below are the main types of adjectives you are likely to encounter in English, together with accompanying explanations for each.

**Participial Adjectives**

A [participial adjective](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-participial-adjective-1691486) is an adjective that has the same form as the [participle](https://www.thoughtco.com/participle-verb-form-1691586) (a verb ending in *-ing* or *-ed/-en*) and usually exhibits the ordinary properties of an adjective. For example:

"What kind of a man was he to fall in love with a *lying* thief?"  
– Janet Dailey, "The Hostage Bride"

In the sentence, the verb *lie*is altered by adding the ending *-ing* to form the participial adjective *lying*, which then describes the noun *thief.*Also, the comparative and superlative forms of participial adjectives are formed with *more* and *most* and *less* and *least*—not with the endings *-er* and *-est*.

**Absolute Adjectives**

An [absolute adjective](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-absolute-adjective-1689047)*—*such as *supreme* or *infinite*—is an adjective with a meaning that cannot be [intensified](https://www.thoughtco.com/intensifier-grammar-term-1691176) or [compared](https://www.thoughtco.com/comparative-degree-adjectives-and-adverbs-1689881). It is also known as an *incomparable*, *ultimate*, or *absolute modifier*. [English Language Centres](https://www.ecenglish.com/learnenglish/lessons/what-are-absolute-adjectives) gives this example of an absolute adjective:

* He is *dead*.

In the sentence, the word *dead*is an absolute adjective. The person is either *dead*or he is not, says the firm that offers online and in-person English language courses. You cannot be *deader* than someone else and you cannot be the *deadest*among a group. According to some [style guides](https://www.thoughtco.com/style-guide-reference-work-1691998), absolute adjectives are always in the superlative degree. However, some absolute adjectives can be quantified by the addition of the word *almost*, *nearly*, or *virtually*.

**Attributive and Predicative Adjectives**

An [attributive adjective](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-attributive-adjective-1689145) usually comes before the noun it modifies without a [linking verb](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-linking-verb-1691243). For example, take this sentence from Maya Angelou's work "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings":

"In those *tender* mornings, the Store was full of laughing, joking, boasting, and bragging."

The word *tender*is an attributive adjective because it precedes and modifies the noun *mornings.*Attributive adjectives are direct [modifiers](https://www.thoughtco.com/modifier-in-grammar-1691400) of [nominals](https://www.thoughtco.com/nominal-in-grammar-1691431).

By contrast, a [predicative adjective](https://www.thoughtco.com/predicative-adjective-1691656) usually comes after a [linking verb](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-linking-verb-1691243) rather than before a noun. Another term for a predicative adjective is a [subject complement](https://www.thoughtco.com/subject-complement-grammar-1692001). The Oxford Online Living Dictionaries gives this example:

* The cat is *black*.

In general, when adjectives are used after a verb such as *be*, *become*, *grow*, *look,* or *seem*, they’re called *predicative adjectives*, says the dictionary.

**Comparative and Superlative Adjectives**

The [comparative adjective](https://www.thoughtco.com/exercise-comparative-superlative-forms-adjectives-1690969) is the form of an adjective involving the comparisons of more or less as well as greater or lesser.

Comparative adjectives in English are either marked by the [suffix](https://www.thoughtco.com/suffix-grammar-1692159) *-er* (as in "the *faster* bike") or identified by the word more or less ("the*more difficult*job"). Almost all [one-syllable](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-monosyllable-1691325) adjectives, along with some two-syllable adjectives, add *-er* to the [base](https://www.thoughtco.com/base-form-of-a-verb-1689160) to form the comparative. In most adjectives of two or more [syllables](https://www.thoughtco.com/syllable-definition-1692165), the comparative is identified by the word *more*or*less*.

The superlative adjective, by comparison, is the form or [degree](https://www.thoughtco.com/degree-adjectives-and-adverbs-1690426) of an adjective that indicates the most or the least of something. Superlatives are either marked by the suffix *-est* (as in "the *fastest* bike") or identified by the word *most* or *least*("the *most difficult* job"). Similar to comparative adjectives, almost all one-syllable adjectives, along with some two-syllable adjectives, add *-est* to the base to form the superlative. In most adjectives of two or more syllables, the superlative is identified by the word *most*or*least*. Not all adjectives have superlative forms.

After a superlative, *in* or *of* plus a [noun phrase](https://www.thoughtco.com/noun-phrase-or-np-1691441) can be used to indicate what is being compared (as in "the *tallest* building in the world" and "the *best* time of my life").

**Compound Adjectives**

A [compound adjective](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-compound-adjective-grammar-1689879) is made up of two or more words (such as *part-time* and *high-speed*) that act as a single idea to [modify](https://www.thoughtco.com/modifier-in-grammar-1691400) a noun (a *part-time* employee, a *high-speed* chase). Compound adjectives are also called phrasal adjectives or compound modifiers.

As a general rule, the words in a compound adjective are [hyphenated](https://www.thoughtco.com/hyphen-punctuation-term-1690944) when they come before a noun (a *well-known* actor) but not when they come after (The actor is *well known*). Compound adjectives formed with an [adverb](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-adverb-1689070) ending in *-ly* (such as *rapidly changing*) are usually not hyphenated.

**Demonstrative Adjectives**

A [demonstrative adjective](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-demonstrative-in-grammar-1690433) is a [determiner](https://www.thoughtco.com/determiner-in-grammar-1690442) that comes before and points to a particular noun. Indeed, a demonstrative adjective is sometimes called ademonstrative determiner*.* For example:

* Son, take *this* bat and hit *that* ball out of the park.

There are four demonstratives in English:

* The "near" demonstratives: *this* and *these*
* The "far" demonstratives: *that* and *those*
* The [singular](https://www.thoughtco.com/singular-they-grammar-1691963) demonstratives: *this*and *that*
* The [plural](https://www.thoughtco.com/plural-grammar-1691638) demonstratives: *these* and *those*

**Appositive Adjectives**

An [appositive adjective](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-appositive-adjective-1688999) is a traditional grammatical term for an adjective (or a series of adjectives) that follows a noun and, like a [nonrestrictive](https://www.thoughtco.com/nonrestrictive-element-term-1691436) [appositive](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-appositive-grammar-1689128), is set off by [commas](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-comma-punctuation-1689871) or [dashes](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-dash-in-punctuation-1690416). For example:

"Arthur was a big boy, *tall, strong, and broad-shouldered*."  
– Janet B. Pascal, "Arthur Conan Doyle: Beyond Baker Street"

As the example shows, appositive adjectives often appear in pairs or groups of three, called [tricolons](https://www.thoughtco.com/tricolon-rhetoric-1692565).

**Denominal Adjectives**

A [denominal adjective](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-denominal-adjective-1690377) is formed from a noun, usually with the addition of a suffix—such as *hopeless, earthen, cowardly, childish*, and *Reaganesque*. An example would be:

* Our new neighborhood seemed romantic, somehow, and very *San Franciscoish*, especially to a couple of young people who hailed from Idaho.

In this sentence, the [proper noun](https://www.thoughtco.com/proper-noun-grammar-1691690) *San Francisco* is altered with the suffix *-ish* to form the denominal adjective. These kinds of adjectives can heighten the drama and descriptiveness of a sentence, as in this example:

"The president's oration was...*Lincolnian* in its cadences, and in some ways, was the final, impassioned, heart-felt rebuke to all those, including his opponent, who tried to portray him as somehow un-American."  
– Andrew Sullivan, "The American President." *The Daily Beast*, Nov. 7, 2012

**Nominal Adjectives**

The term [nominal adjective](https://www.thoughtco.com/nominal-in-grammar-1691431)refers to an adjective or group of adjectives that function as a noun. "The Complete English Grammar Rules" by Farlex International notes that nominal adjectives are generally preceded by the word *the* and can be found as the subject or the object of a sentence or clause. For example:

* The *elderly* are a great source of wisdom.

The word *elderly*generally acts as a true adjective—an *elderly*gentleman—but in the previous sentence, it functions as a [collective noun](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-collective-noun-1689864) and as the subject of the sentence. Nominal adjectives are also known as [substantive](https://www.thoughtco.com/substantive-grammar-1692157) adjectives.

**Adjectival Observations**

Not everyone is a fan of adjectives. Constance Hale, in "Sin and Syntax: How to Craft Wickedly Effective Prose," noted that the famous humorist and author Mark Twain had some rather negative comments about this part of speech:

"When you catch an adjective, kill it. No, I don't mean utterly, but kill most of them—then the rest will be valuable. They weaken when they are close together. They give strength when they are wide apart."​

And in his 2002 memorial eulogy to former British Cabinet Minister Barbara Castle, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw recalled her remark:

"Bugger the adjectives. It's the nouns and verbs people want."  
– Ned Halley, "Dictionary of Modern English Grammar"

Nouns generally are the subject of a sentence, while verbs do describe the action or state of being. But used effectively and correctly, as you see from the previous examples, adjectives can indeed enhance many sentences by adding colorful, vivid, and detailed description, increasing interest in an otherwise mundane sentence.

An *adverb* is a [part of speech](https://www.thoughtco.com/part-of-speech-english-grammar-1691590) (or [word class](https://www.thoughtco.com/word-class-grammar-1692608)) that's primarily used to [modify](https://www.thoughtco.com/modification-in-grammar-1691323) a [verb](https://www.thoughtco.com/verb-definition-1692592), [adjective](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-adjective-clause-1689064), or other adverbs and can additionally modify [prepositional phrases](https://www.thoughtco.com/prepositional-phrase-1691663), [subordinate clauses](https://www.thoughtco.com/subordinate-clause-grammar-1692149), and complete [sentences](https://www.thoughtco.com/sentence-grammar-1692087). Put another way, adverbs are [content words](https://www.thoughtco.com/content-lexical-word-1689918) that provide information about how, when, or where something happens. Adverbs are also called *intensifiers* because they intensify the meaning of the word or words they are modifying, notes [Your Dictionary](http://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-adverbs.html).

An adverb that modifies an adjective—as in *quite* sad—or another adverb—as in *very* carelessly—appears immediately in front of the word it modifies, but one that modifies a verb is generally more flexible: It may appear before or after—as in *softly* sang or sang *softly*—or at the beginning of the sentence—*Softly*she sang to the baby—with the position of an adverb typically affecting the meaning of the sentence. [Adverbs](https://www.thoughtco.com/adverbs-of-frequency-sentence-placement-4053163) can modify a verb or adjective in several ways, by providing information about emphasis, manner, time, place, and frequency.