**Adjectives Part 2: Intensifiers & Mitigators**

**Intensifiers with strong adjectives**

Strong adjectives are words like:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **very big** | *enormous*, *huge* |
| **very small** | *Tiny* |
| **very clever** | *Brilliant* |
| **very bad** | *awful*, *terrible*, *disgusting*, *dreadful* |
| **very sure** | *Certain* |
| **very good** | *excellent*, *perfect*, *ideal*, *wonderful*, *splendid* |
| **very tasty** | *Delicious* |

We do **not** normally use *very* with these adjectives. We do not say something is *~~very enormous~~* or someone is *~~very brilliant~~*.   
  
With strong adjectives, we normally use intensifiers like:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *absolutely completely exceptionally particularly* | *really* *quite* *totally* *utterly* |

*The film was* ***absolutely awful****.  
He was an* ***exceptionally brilliant*** *child.  
The food smelled* ***really disgusting****.*

**Intensifiers with particular adjectives**

Some intensifiers go with particular adjectives depending on the meaning of the adjective:

*I'm afraid your wife is* ***dangerously ill****.  
The engine was* ***dangerously hot****.  
The car was* ***seriously damaged****.  
Fortunately none of the passengers was* ***seriously hurt****.*

Some intensifiers go with particular adjectives. For example, we use the intensifier *highly* with the adjectives *successful*, *intelligent*, *likely* and *unlikely*:

*He was* ***highly intelligent****.  
She’s a* ***highly successful*** *businesswoman.*

but we do NOT say:

*~~We had a~~* ***~~highly tasty~~*** *~~meal.~~  
~~That is a~~* ***~~highly good~~*** *~~idea.~~*

We use the intensifier *bitterly* with the adjectives *disappointed*, *unhappy* and *cold*:

*I was* ***bitterly unhappy*** *at school.  
We were* ***bitterly disappointed*** *to lose the match.  
It can get* ***bitterly cold*** *in winter.*

You need to use your dictionary to find which nouns these intensifiers go with

**Intensifiers with comparatives and superlatives**

We use these words and phrases as intensifiers with **comparative adjectives**:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *much far a lot quite a lot* | *a great deal a good deal a good bit a fair bit* |

*He is* ***much older*** *than me.  
New York is* ***a lot bigger*** *than Boston.*

We use *much* and *far* as intensifiers with **comparative adjectives in front of a noun**:

*France is* ***a much bigger country*** *than Britain.  
He is* ***a far better player*** *than Ronaldo.*

We use these words as intensifiers with **superlative adjectives**: *easily*, *by far*, *much*:

*The blue whale is* ***easily the biggest*** *animal in the world.  
This car was* ***by far the most expensive****.*

**Adjectives as intensifiers**

We use some adjectives as intensifiers with [nouns](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/english-grammar-reference/nouns):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *absolute complete total* | *perfect real utter* |

We say:

*He's a* ***complete idiot****.  
They were talking* ***utter nonsense****.*

but we do NOT say:

*~~The~~* ***~~idiot~~*** *~~was~~* ***~~complete~~****~~.~~*  
*~~The~~* ***~~nonsense~~*** *~~they were talking was~~* ***~~utter~~****~~.~~*

Mitigators are the **opposite of** [**intensifiers**](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/english-grammar-reference/intensifiers). When we want to make an [adjective](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/english-grammar-reference/adjectives) **less strong** we use these words: *fairly, rather, quite*

*By the end of the day, we were* ***rather*** *tired.  
The film wasn't great, but it was* ***quite*** *exciting.*

and in informal English: *pretty*

*We had a* ***pretty*** *good time at the party.*

| **Be careful!** |
| --- |
| **Level: advanced**  **quite**  When we use *quite* with a **normal adjective**, it makes the adjective **less strong**:  *The food was* ***quite bad****.* (= The food was bad but not very bad.)  *My nephew is* ***quite clever****.* (= My nephew is clever but not very clever.)  But when we use *quite* with a **strong adjective**, it means the same as ***absolutely***:  *The food was* ***quite awful****.* (*=* The food was absolutely awful.)  *As a child he was* ***quite brilliant****.* (*=* As a child he was absolutely brilliant.) |

**Level: intermediate**

**Mitigators with comparatives**

We use these words and phrases as mitigators:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *a bit just a bit a little a little bit* | *rather slightly just a little bit* |

*She's* ***a bit younger*** *than I am.  
It takes two hours on the train but it is* ***a little bit longer*** *by road.  
This one is* ***rather bigger****.*

We use *slightly* and *rather* as mitigators with [comparative adjectives](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/english-grammar-reference/comparative-and-superlative-adjectives) in front of a noun:

*This is* ***a slightly more expensive*** *model than that.  
This is* ***a rather bigger one*** *than that.*

We often use **two** [**nouns**](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/english-grammar-reference/nouns) **together** to show that **one thing is a part of something else**:

*the* ***village church*** *the* ***car door*** *the* ***kitchen window*** *the* ***chair leg*** *my* ***coat pocket***  
***London residents***

In these examples, the first noun is called a **noun modifier**.

| **Be careful!** |
| --- |
| We do not use a [possessive form](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/english-grammar-reference/possessives-nouns) for these things. We do NOT talk about:  *~~the car's door~~ ~~the kitchen's window~~ ~~the chair's leg~~* |

We can use noun modifiers to show **what something is made of**:

*a* ***gold*** *watch  
a* ***leather*** *purse  
a* ***metal*** *box*

We often use noun modifiers **with nouns ending in –*er***:

*an* ***office*** *worker  
a* ***jewellery*** *maker  
a* ***potato*** *peeler*

We use **measurements**, **age** or **value** as noun modifiers:

*a* ***thirty-kilogram*** *suitcase  
a* ***two-minute*** *rest  
a* ***five-thousand-euro*** *platinum watch  
a* ***fifty-kilometre*** *journey*

We often use **nouns ending in -*ing*** as noun modifiers:

*a* ***shopping*** *list       
a* ***swimming*** *lesson       
a* ***walking*** *holiday       
a* ***washing*** *machine*

We often put two nouns together and **readers/listeners have to work out** what they mean:

*an* ***ice*** *bucket*  
(= a bucket to keep ice in)

*an* ***ice*** *cube*  
(= a cube made of ice)

*an* ***ice*** *breaker*  
(= a ship which breaks ice)

*the* ***ice*** *age*   
(= the time when much of the Earth was covered in ice)

Sometimes we find **more than two nouns** together:

***London office*** *workers*  
***grammar practice*** *exercises*

Noun modifiers come [after adjectives](https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/english-grammar-reference/adjectives):

*the* ***old newspaper*** *seller       
a* ***tiring fifty-kilometre*** *journey*