

GRADABLE AND NON-GRADABLE ADJECTIVES

Some adjectives refer to qualities which are *gradable* – we can have more or less of them. For example, people can be more or less *interesting* or *old*; jobs can be more or less *difficult*. Other adjectives refer to *non-gradable* qualities – we do not say that things are more or less *perfect*, *impossible* or *dead*.

Look at these pairs of gradable and non-gradable adjectives:

angry / furious

big / enormous

important / essential

hot / boiling

cold / freezing

tasty / delicious

tired / exhausted

happy / delighted

Different intensifying adverbs go with gradable and non-gradable (limit/extreme) adjectives.

With gradable adjectives		With non-gradable adjectives	
(not) very	pretty	absolutely	really
fairly	really	totally	quite
quite	extremely	completely	pretty
rather			

Not all combinations are possible (there are no rules!). The only combinations that are always possible are:


very + gradable

absolutely + non-gradable

really + gradable / non-gradable

FAIRLY, QUITE, RATHER, PRETTY

not nice fairly nice quite nice rather/pretty nice very nice



- **Fairly** is the weakest of the four. If you say that somebody is *fairly nice*, it is not much of a compliment.
- **Quite** is a little stronger. If you say that a film is *quite good*, you are recommending it: it is not the best film ever made, but it is certainly worth seeing.
- **Rather** is stronger again; it often means *more than is usual* or *more than expected*. If a film is *rather good*, it is better than most. This use is not common in American English.
- **Pretty** is similar to *rather*, but it is mostly used in informal style.