Usually the modifier (adverb or adjective) comes before the word described. However, sometimes the modifiers must come after the word described.

He worked barely. Wrong! INCORRECT

He barely worked. CORRECT

This is a far from satisfactory scenario. CORRECT

This is a scenario far from satisfaction. Wrong! INCORRECT

The meaning of the sentence may change depending on where you put the modifying word.

Happily she died. Happily describes the writer's attitude to her death (the writer is happy that 'she' died).

She died happily. Happily describes the condition of the person who died (She was happy when she died).

Some modifiers (such as concern) change their meaning depending on whether they come before or after the word they describe:

The concerned man carried the child to safety. Concerned here means a caring man.

The man concerned carried the child to safety. Concerned here means the man being referred to.

Here are some other examples:

The treasurer was present. The treasurer was not absent.

The present treasurer is Mr. Smith. Mr Smith holds the position of treasurer at the present time.

Robin Harris was late. Robin Harris did not arrive on time.

The late Robin Harris was a friend of mine. Robin Harris is no longer alive.

My friend is poor. My friend has little money.

My poor friend had an accident. My friend is in an unfortunate situation.

Adjectives usually go before the noun they describe. When there are several adjectives, use this order.

FIRST: more general or subjective adjectives; (e.g. pretty, nice):

She wore a beautiful, golden costume.

LAST: more specific and objective adjectives; (e.g. colors, styles, nationalities and nouns used as adjectives):

An exquisite, old carved wooden table.

A long boring technical book.

An unbelievable ghost story.

If two adjectives are have similar meanings we put the shorter one first:

... a quiet, intelligent woman.

You should generally follow this word order:

Determiners

Numbers

Descriptive adjectives

Size

Shape

Age

Color

Adjectives of nationality

Noun Adjuncts

Noun

For example:

The two lovely big flat old blue Chinese wooden houses.

Make your writing vivid and persuasive by using a variety of descriptive words: do not just use very common adjectives. Try to use more descriptive synonyms (words with similar meanings) instead of trite adjectives such as bad, good, beautiful, wrong, right etc.

Study this example of a short descriptive passage. Notice the use of the adjectives in bold, including adjective phrases and clauses in the following passage. Can you find the word near the end of the passage that is normally an adjective, but acts like a noun here?

"On shorter stops, when only the driver got out, women and children would swarm around the bus and its load of potential buyers like bees to honey to sell their goods through the window: corn on the cob, roasted, black, fried bananas and hot pepper sandwiches, green oranges, fried millet-dough balls, long, clear plastic bags of water, and more palm fronds at 20 cents a piece for those who forgot them at home or for the extravagant who wanted one in each hand."

This passage is from Letters from Mali: Meeting The Dogons. It's a very interesting letter and shows how descriptive words can be effectively used to convey a sense of place.