

Definition:

Adjectives are used almost exclusively to modify nouns, as well as any phrase or part of speech functioning as a noun.

Adjectives give us more information. They modify or describe features and qualities of people, animals and things.

For example

- *“Abdul wears red glasses.” (Red modifies the noun glasses.)*
- *“A loud group of students passed by.” (Loud modifies the noun phrase group of students.)*
- *“Excellent writing is required for this job.” (Excellent modifies the gerund writing.)*

Adjectives are one of the four major word classes, along with nouns, verbs and adverbs. Examples of adjectives are: big, small, blue, old, rich and nice. They give us more information about people, animals or things represented by nouns and pronouns:

*That’s a **big** house.*

*Look at the **grey** horse.*

*Some dogs have **long** tails.*

*She is **tall**.*

Here are some of the common meanings.

Examples	Meaning

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<p><i>I am fond of ice cream.</i></p> <p><i>Cairo is different from Alexandria.</i></p> <p><i>His car is similar to mine.</i></p> <p><i>Other examples:</i> <i>keen (on), near (to), aware (of)</i></p>	<p><i>Relations between people and things.</i> <i>These adjectives usually require a word or phrase (complement) to complete their meaning.</i></p>
<p><i>He's generous.</i></p> <p><i>She's a kind woman.</i></p> <p><i>The waiter was very polite.</i></p> <p><i>Other examples:</i> <i>talkative, cruel, cooperative, helpful, useful</i></p>	<p><i>Descriptions of people and things in terms of their actions.</i></p>
<p><i>That's an old house.</i></p> <p><i>The Olympic stadium is big.</i></p> <p><i>Other examples:</i> <i>tall, old, good, rough, true, ugly, red, heavy</i></p>	<p><i>Features that will last a long time or will not change (permanent).</i></p>
<p><i>Anyone hungry? Lunch is nearly ready.</i></p> <p><i>It's so cold in Nick's house.</i></p> <p><i>Other examples:</i> <i>absent, ill, dry, full, lonely,</i></p>	<p><i>States and conditions that can change.</i></p>

Examples	Meaning
wet, hot, thirsty, angry	
<p><i>I saw a great French film last night.</i></p> <p><i>I don't like modern paintings.</i></p> <p><i>I live in a detached house.</i></p> <p><i>Other examples:</i></p> <p><i>organic (vegetables), impressionist (painter), wild (salmon)</i></p>	<p><i>Classifying people and things into types.</i></p>

Most common adjectives are members of a pair of opposites (antonyms):

<i>beautiful – ugly</i>	<i>dead – alive</i>	<i>happy – sad</i>	<i>rough – smooth</i>
<i>big – small</i>	<i>dry – wet</i>	<i>heavy – light</i>	<i>tall – short</i>
<i>cold – hot</i>	<i>good – bad</i>		

Gradable and upgradable

Many pairs of opposites are gradable, i.e. they have different degrees of the same feature:

Small:

*This suitcase is **extremely small**.*

This suitcase is **very small**.

This suitcase is **quite small**.

Hot:

It was **reasonably hot** in Italy this summer.

It was **quite hot** in Italy this summer.

It was **pretty hot** in Italy this summer.

It was **very hot** in Italy this summer.

It was **extremely hot** in Italy this summer.

One type of adjective is not gradable. These are the adjectives that we use to classify people and things into types:

Warning:

These vegetables are **organic**.

Not: ~~These vegetables are very organic.~~

I like salmon especially when it is **wild**.

Not: ~~I like salmon especially when it is quite wild.~~

The comparative and the superlative

Comparative adjectives

Comparative adjectives are used to compare differences between the two objects they modify (larger, smaller, faster, higher). They are used in sentences where two nouns are compared, in this pattern:

Noun (subject) + verb + comparative adjective + than + noun (object).

The second item of comparison can be omitted if it is clear from the context (final example below).

Test your knowledge

Examples

- My house is **larger** than hers.
- This box is **smaller** than the one I lost.
- Your dog runs **faster** than Jim's dog.
- The rock flew **higher** than the roof.
- Jim and Jack are both my friends, but I like Jack **better**. ("than Jim" is understood)

Superlative adjectives

Superlative adjectives are used to describe an object which is at the upper or lower limit of a quality (the tallest, the smallest, the fastest, the highest). They are used in sentences where a subject is compared to a group of objects.

Rules:

Noun (subject) + verb + the + superlative adjective + noun (object).

The group that is being compared with can be omitted if it is clear from the context (final example below).

Examples

- My house is the **largest** one in our neighborhood.
- This is the **smallest** box I've ever seen.
- Your dog ran the **fastest** of any dog in the race.
- We all threw our rocks at the same time. My rock flew the **highest**. ("of all the rocks" is understood)

Forming regular comparatives and superlatives:

Forming comparatives and superlatives is easy. The form depends on the number of syllables in the original adjective.

One syllable adjectives

Add -er for the comparative and -est for the superlative. If the adjective has a consonant + single vowel + consonant spelling, the final consonant must be doubled before adding the ending.

<i>Adjective</i>	<i>Comparative</i>	<i>Superlative</i>
<i>Tall</i>	<i>Taller</i>	<i>Tallest</i>
<i>Fat</i>	<i>Fatter</i>	<i>Fattest</i>
<i>Big</i>	<i>Bigger</i>	<i>Biggest</i>
<i>Sad</i>	<i>Sadder</i>	<i>Saddest</i>

Two syllables

Adjectives with two syllables can form the comparative either by adding -er or by preceding the adjective with more. These adjectives form the superlative either by adding -est or by preceding the adjective with most. In many cases, both forms are used, although one usage will be more common than the other. If you are not sure whether a two-syllable

adjective can take a comparative or superlative ending, play it safe and use more and most instead. For adjectives ending in y, change the y to an i before adding the ending.

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative
<i>Happy</i>	<i>Happier</i>	<i>Happiest</i>
<i>Simple</i>	<i>Simpler</i>	<i>Simplest</i>
<i>Busy</i>	<i>Busier</i>	<i>Busiest</i>
<i>Tilted</i>	<i>more tilted</i>	<i>most tilted</i>
<i>Tangled</i>	<i>more tangled</i>	<i>most tangled</i>

Three or more syllables

Adjectives with three or more syllables form the comparative by putting more in front of the adjective, and the superlative by putting most in front.

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative

<i>Adjective</i>	<i>Comparative</i>	<i>Superlative</i>
<i>important</i>	<i>more important</i>	<i>most important</i>
<i>expensive</i>	<i>more expensive</i>	<i>most expensive</i>

Irregular comparatives and superlatives

These very common adjectives have completely irregular comparative and superlative forms.

<i>Adjective</i>	<i>Comparative</i>	<i>Superlative</i>
<i>Good</i>	<i>better</i>	<i>Best</i>
<i>Bad</i>	<i>worse</i>	<i>Worst</i>
<i>Little</i>	<i>Less</i>	<i>Least</i>
<i>Much</i>	<i>more</i>	<i>Most</i>

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative
<i>Far</i>	<i>further / farther</i>	<i>furthest / farthest</i>

Examples

- Today is the **worst** day I've had in a long time.
- You play tennis **better** than I do.
- This is the **least** expensive sweater in the store.
- This sweater is **less** expensive than that one.
- I ran pretty far yesterday, but I ran even **farther** today.

Other categories of adjectives

There is a huge variety of adjectives in English. While many words are inherently adjectival, such as colors (red, black, yellow, etc.) or characteristics (strong, weak, nice, etc.), there are also several categories of adjectives that are formed from other sources. The table below gives a brief breakdown of these different categories of adjectives, along with some examples of how they are used in a sentence. Go to each individual section to learn more.

Category of Adjective	Definition	Example of adjectives	Example of sentences
Proper Adjectives	Formed from proper nouns to create descriptive words.	Italian, Shakespearean, Alaskan, Middle Eastern, Nordic	"He writes in a Shakespearean style."
Compound Adjectives	Created from two or more words that	top-right, last-minute, sugar-free, record-	"I know this is a last-minute suggestion,

	work together to modify the same noun; they are often joined with one or more hyphens.	breaking, expensive-looking	but it's a good idea."
Demonstrative Adjectives (or Demonstrative Determiners)	Used to specify what we are referring to and whether it is singular or plural, and to give more information about its proximity to the speaker.	this, that, these, those	"These cups are very pretty."
Interrogative Adjectives (or Interrogative Determiners)	Usually used to ask questions about something.	Usually used to ask questions about something.	"Whose computer is this?"
Nominal Adjectives	Adjectives that perform the function of a noun in a sentence. They are preceded by the word the,	the best, the strongest, the blue	"He wants the red car, but I want the blue."

	and can be found as the subject or the object of a sentence or clause.		
Collective Adjectives	A subgroup of nominal adjectives, used to refer to a group of people based on a shared characteristic.	the rich, the poor, the innocent, the French, the Americans, the Dutch	“The rich should help the poor.”