

# English Adjectives and Adverbs

Knowing what is an adjective and what is an adverb is very important when you learn English grammar. For example, the following sentences are typical mistakes caused by confusion over the difference between adjectives and adverbs.

“He works **hardly**.” (Correct: “He works **hard**.”)

“She writes **good**.” (Correct: “He writes **well**.”)

“It’s a **really** problem.” (Correct: “It’s a **real** problem.”)

**Adjectives** describe nouns.

“A good student.”

“A nice day.”

“He is interesting.”

**Adverbs** describe verbs or adjectives.

“He eats well.”

“She learns quickly.”

“I’m really tired.”

## Why adjectives and adverbs can be difficult

1. Some adjectives and adverbs have the same form.

“She’s a **fast** driver.” (adj)

“She drives **fast**.” (adv)

“TOEFL is a **hard** exam.” (adj)

“The students work **hard**.” (adv)

“She has **straight** hair.” (adj)

“He went **straight** home.” (adv)

2. Not all adverbs end in -ly.

For example: “She works **well** with others.”

“Eagles fly **high** in the sky.”

3. Some adverbs have two meanings.

**Hard**

“He works hard.”

“I hardly know him.” (barely)

**Close**

“She sat close to the conductor on the bus.” (next to)

“I listened closely to what he said.” (paying attention)

**Dead**

“You’re dead right!” (completely right)

“This snake is deadly – watch out for it.” (fatal)

**Fair**

“He was fairly treated by the Immigration authorities.” (justly)

“It’s fairly cold today.” (quite)

**Fine**

“How do you feel? Fine.” (well)

“Finely chop the tomatoes.” (in small pieces)

**Free**

“The english-at-home.com website is free of charge.” (no money needed)

“Children can play freely in this park.” (no limits to their freedom)

**High**

“We’ll need to raise prices high in order to survive.” (high prices)

“I think highly of him.” (a high opinion)

“He’s highly paid.” (very well paid)

**Late**

“He arrived late for the meeting.” (not on time)

“There have been a few complaints lately.” (recently)

**Right**

“She walked right up to him and demanded to see the manager.” (didn’t stop until she got close to him)

“He rightly thought that he was going to lose his job.” (correctly thought)

**Wrong**

“He wrongly told her that he had been promoted.” (incorrectly)

“This is spelt wrong.” (incorrect)

(You can only use ‘wrong’ when it’s after the verb.)

4. Some words that end in -ly are not adverbs, but are adjectives.

For example, lovely, friendly, silly, lonely.

“She is silly.”

“She behaves in a silly way.”

“Her children are lovely.”

“He treated her in a lovely way.”

5. Some verbs are followed by adjectives.

“You look good today!”

“This soup tastes nice.”

“He seems pleasant.”

“I don’t feel very happy at the moment.”

In these examples, you are describing the subject (such as ‘the soup’) rather than the verb (‘tastes’).

## Adjective order

If you have more than one adjective, what order do you put them in? For example, is it “a green leather chair” or “a leather green chair”?

Here are some guidelines for adjective order.

1. The closer the adjective to the noun, the more it defines the noun. So we’d say “an antique engagement ring” rather than “an engagement antique ring” because “engagement” defines what sort of ring it is.

The further from the noun, the less closely the adjective defines the noun.

2. We separate two adjectives with a comma (not “and”). So, “she had a small, yappy dog” and not “She had a small and yappy dog”.

3. We use “and” after the verb “to be” and with colour adjectives.  
“The dog was small, white and vicious. It wore a red and white jacket when it went out for walks.”

## Adjective order

Opinion, size, shape, age, colour, origin, material, defining

Examples:

She wore a beautiful, white, wedding dress.

Her mother wore an ugly, big, square, green hat.

The groom wore a stylish, grey, Italian suit.

## Adverbs of frequency

We use these adverbs of frequency to say how often we do something.

**always**

**often / frequently**

**usually / generally**

**sometimes / occasionally**

**hardly ever / rarely**

**never**

For example, “I always drink coffee in the morning” means I drink coffee **every** morning.

Be careful of the pronunciation of “rarely”. The “**are**” part of the word is spoken like the word **air**. The word has two syllables – ‘rare’ and ‘ly’.

## Putting these expressions into a sentence

These words go before the main verb.

“She **often goes** to the beach in summer.”

They go after the verb ‘to be’.

“He **is occasionally** late for meetings.”

They go after ‘modal’ or ‘auxiliary’ verbs.

“It **can sometimes** get cold in the UK.”

“I **have never** been to the USA.”

‘From time to time’ is an expression that means the same as ‘sometimes’. It normally goes at the end of a sentence.

For example, “I go to restaurants **from time to time**.”

## Some verb and adverb partnerships

Some verbs and adverbs go together naturally in English and it’s often helpful to learn them as expressions.

**act quickly:** “We have to act quickly if we want to agree to their deal.”

**listen attentively:** “She listened attentively to what her boss was saying.”

**play fair:** “I don’t feel that you are playing fair – you seem to change your mind when it suits you!”

**search thoroughly:** “The police searched the house thoroughly, but couldn’t find any evidence.”

**sigh deeply:** “He sighed deeply when he heard the news.”

**sit comfortably:** “She was sitting comfortably on a sofa when he walked in.”

**speak softly:** “It was difficult to hear her as she was speaking softly.”

**think carefully:** “Please think about this carefully – it’s a big decision.”

**vary widely:** “Marriage customs vary widely from culture to culture.”

**work hard:** “We work hard in the office.”