

Adjectives

WHAT IS AN ADJECTIVE?

An adjective is a word that modifies a noun or pronoun to make the sentence clearer and more specific. Adjectives answer the following questions: What kind? How many? Which one?

Adjective Usage

⇒ If an adjective is placed after the noun or pronoun it modifies, it follows the form *to be*:

He was always **forgetful**.

← Here the adjective *forgetful* modifies the pronoun "he."

Ireland is **lush** and **green**.

← Here both *lush* and *green* are adjectives modifying Ireland.

⇒ Adjectives can also follow sense or appearance verbs such as look, taste, smell, feel, and sound:

The night air from the ocean smells **crisp**.

← Here the adjective *crisp* modifies the air.

She looks very **beautiful** tonight.

← Here the adjective *beautiful* modifies the pronoun "she."

⇒ Adjectives can also be placed before the nouns they modify:

The **colorful** sunset can be seen in the photograph.

← Here the adjective *colorful* modifies the sunset.

Compound Adjectives

⇒ A compound adjective is formed when two words are used as one expression to modify the *same* noun. A hyphen is placed between the two words when they precede the noun being modified:

Her friend is a **well-known** author.

← Here the compound adjective *well-known* modifies author.

⇒ In most cases, a hyphen is not used between the two words when they follow the noun being modified:

Her friend is **well known** as an author.

* For more information on compound adjectives, refer to the skills page on Hyphens.

Series of Adjectives

⇒ A series of adjectives is formed when you are using two or more adjectives to describe the same noun or pronoun. A series of adjectives requires commas if the order of the adjectives can be rearranged without changing the meaning of the sentence:

The **big, juicy, delicious** hamburger was on the grill.

Here the adjectives *big*, *juicy*, and *delicious* form a series modifying the hamburger.

The **juicy, delicious, big** hamburger was on the grill.

Rearranging the order of adjectives in this series does not change the meaning of the sentence, so commas are required.

⇒ If the order of adjectives in a series cannot be rearranged, then no commas are needed:

Her **five large Siamese** cats were meowing.

Her **large Siamese five** cats were meowing.

The sentence does not make any sense if you rearrange the order of the adjectives in this series, so no commas are required.

Proper Adjectives

⇒ Proper adjectives are formed from proper nouns and are always capitalized:

The **French** woman was getting on the plane.

Here the adjective *French* modifies the woman.

The church on the corner is **Episcopalian**.

Here the adjective *Episcopalian* modifies the church

Comparative Adjectives

⇒ Comparative adjectives are used to show the difference between two nouns or pronouns by stating that one has more of something than the other. These adjectives are usually formed by adding -er and are followed by the word “than” to show comparison:

The frame we bought is **smaller than** the picture we took.

Here, the comparative adjective *smaller* is showing the difference between the frame and the picture.

⇒ Some comparative adjectives are formed by adding the words “more” or “less” in front of the adjective and are followed by the word “than” to show comparison. This rule applies to adjectives that are two syllables or more and do not end in -y:

This year’s Chemistry exam was **more difficult than** last year’s.

Here, the comparative adjective *more difficult* is showing the difference between both exams.

Superlative Adjectives

⇒ Superlative adjectives are used to show the difference between three or more nouns or pronouns by stating that one has the most or least of a certain quality. These adjectives are usually formed by adding -est and are preceded by the word “the,” as there can only be one superlative:

She is **the tallest** girl in her grade.

← Here, the superlative adjective *tallest* shows that she is taller than *all* of the other girls in her grade, not just one.

⇒ Some superlative adjectives are formed by adding the word “most” or “least” in front of the adjective and are preceded by the word “the.” This rule applies to adjectives that are two syllables or more and do not end in -y:

The novel we were assigned is **the most interesting** one I’ve read in a while.

← Here the superlative adjective *most interesting* shows that the novel is not just more interesting than another, but it is the *most* interesting out of many.