GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS
Using Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs are words that modify or qualify the meanings of other words. Adjectives describe, identify, or quantify nouns or pronouns; adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, or clauses. Adjectives tell us "which one," "what kind of," or "how many" and usually come before the word they modify:

> the **red** barn (answers the question "which" barn)

> an **excellent** performance (answers the question "what kind of" performance)

> for **three** months (answers the question "how many" months)

Although most adjectives precede the noun or other word(s) they modify, they can also follow linking verbs (be, seem, appear, become) and function as a subject or object complement, for example, "The performance was **excellent**." In this sentence, the adjective "**excellent**" functions as a subject complement that modifies the noun "performance."

Adverbs, on the other hand, tell us "where," "when," "how," "why," "to what extent," or "under what conditions." Many adverbs are formed by adding "**-ly**" to an adjective (swift/**swiftly**; cautious/**cautiously**; efficient/**efficiently**). However, for most adjectives ending in "**-ic**," add "**-ally**" (artistic/**artistically**).

> She responded **swiftly** to the emergency. ("**swiftly**" modifies the verb "responded")

> He worked **cautiously** and **efficiently**. (both "**cautiously**" and "**efficiently**" modify the verb "worked")

> The performance was **artistically** beautiful. ("**artistically**" modifies the adjective "beautiful")

> She **very** soon realized her mistake. ("**very**" modifies the adverb "soon")

> **Abruptly**, the woman left the party. ("**Abruptly**" modifies the independent clause that makes up the rest of the sentence)

Be mindful that some adjectives also end in "**-ly**" (**lovely**, **friendly**, **womanly**) and have no distinctive adverb form.

> The setting for the wedding was **lovely**.

> The woman in the next apartment is a **friendly** person.

> She has a **womanly** appearance.

USING ADJECTIVES

Most adjectives have three forms: positive (**smart**), comparative (**smarter**), and superlative (**smartest**). The comparative form is used to compare two things; the superlative form is used to compare three or more things. As illustrated above, many short regular adjectives form the comparative by adding "**-er**" to the positive form and the superlative by adding "**-est**" (**tall**, **taller**, **tallest**); however, if the adjective ends in "**-y**," the pattern is adjusted (**pretty**, **prettier**, **prettiest**).

Other adjectives of two or more syllables form the comparative by using "**more**" (**more intelligent**) or "**less**" (**less dangerous**) and the superlative by using "**most**" (**most intelligent**) or "**least**" (**least dangerous**). Some adjectives can also have irregular forms (**good**, **better**, **best**; **bad**, **worse**, **worst**).

Adjectives are used primarily for purposes of evaluation (an **interesting** novel, an **expensive** dinner, an **important** decision, a **beautiful** view) and have different functions in relation to how they are used.

- Descriptive adjectives allow you to make comparisons in relation to age (a **young** assistant, an **old** acquaintance); color (a **golden** notebook, a **white** carnation); size (a **large** apartment, a **huge** commitment); shape (a **long** hallway, a **round** table); material (a **wooden** handle, a **diamond** necklace), or condition (a **faded** envelope, a **tarnished** memory).

- Proper adjectives are formed from proper nouns and as such are capitalized: America (proper noun), **American** (proper adjective), a **European** vacation, a **Navajo** rug, a **Shakespearean** play, a **Protestant** church, a **Catholic** mass, a **Buddhist** temple.

- Possessive adjectives (**my**, **your**, **our**, **their**, **his**, **her**, **its**) are used to point out or indicate a particular noun (**my** brother, **your** sister).

- Demonstrative adjectives (**they**, **that**, **these**, **those**) also refer to a particular noun (**that** student, **those** boxes).

- Numerical or quantity adjectives (**five** pounds, **first** choice, **many** times) are used to indicate a particular amount.

- Interrogative adjectives (**where**, **what**, **which**, **whose**) ask questions about the words they modify (**what** number, **which** floor).

- Compound adjectives consist of two or more words used as a unit to describe a noun (a **sixty-five-year-old** man, an **old-fashioned** attitude).

- Coordinate adjectives usually make subjective or evaluative judgments or assessments and are presented in a sequence. They relate equally to the noun they modify and are separated by commas (the **long, winding, and treacherous** road; the **complex, highly sophisticated, and intricate** system).

In addition to the above, note that articles (**a**, **an**, **the)** are also classified as adjectives or determiners that identify or quantify.

> There is **a** student here to see you. (the indefinite article "**a**" modifies the noun "student" and implies there is only one student)

> The class discussion ended with **an** argument between two of the students. (the indefinite article "**an**" modifies the noun "argument")

> **The** auction was extremely enjoyable and successful. (the definite article "**The**" modifies the noun "auction."

USING ADVERBS

Use an adverb, not an adjective, to modify a verb, for example, "I drive **carefully**." In this sentence, the adverb "**carefully**" is used to modify the verb "drive." Using the adjective "**careful**" would be incorrect. Adverbs can also modify adjectives or other adverbs, for example, "The painting was **extremely** provocative." In this sentence, the adverb "**extremely**" is used to modify the adjective "provocative." In another example ("The building was **really** magnificently designed."), the adverb "**really**" is used to modify the adverb "**magnificently.**"

Most adverbs have the same three forms as adjectives: positive (**efficiently**), comparative (**more efficiently**), and superlative (**most efficiently**); "**more**" is used to form the comparative and "**most**" is used to form the superlative. Some adverbs add "**-er**" and "**-est**" (**hard**, **harder**, **hardest**; **fast**, **faster**, **fastest**); others have irregular forms (**little**, **less**, **least**; **badly**, **worse**, **worst**). As noted above, many adverbs are formed by adding "**-ly**" to an adjective, but remember that not all words ending in "**-ly**" are adverbs.

TROUBLESPOTS

- **good** and **well**: The word "**good**" is an adjective and modifies a noun or pronoun (a **good** experience, a **good** person). The word "**well**" is used as an adverb when it modifies a verb, for example, "The woman did not feel **well**." In this sentence, "**well**" modifies the verb "**did feel**"; to say that the woman "did not feel **good**" would be incorrect. However, "**well**" can also function as an adjective when referring to health, for example, "The woman feels **well**." In this case, "**well**" is being used as an adjective that describes the "woman."

- **bad** and **badly**: The word "**bad**" is an adjective used to describe a noun or pronoun (a **bad** experience, a **bad** person), for example, "She felt **bad** that we had to leave the party." In this sentence, the adjective "**bad**" is used after the linking verb to describe the pronoun "**She**," which is also the subject of the sentence. In another example ("He behaved **badly** at the party."), the adverb "**badly**" is used to modify the verb "**behaved**."