

The Adjective

Recognize an *adjective* when you see one.

Adjectives describe nouns by answering one of these three questions: *What kind is it? How many are there? Which one is it?* An adjective can be a single word, a phrase, or a clause. Check out these examples:

What kind is it?

Dan decided that the **fuzzy green** bread would make an **unappetizing** sandwich.

What kind of bread? *Fuzzy and green!* What kind of sandwich? *Unappetizing!*

A friend **with a fat wallet** will never want for weekend shopping partners.

What kind of friend? *One with money to spend!*

A towel **that is still warm from the dryer** is more comforting than a hot fudge sundae.

What kind of towel? *One right out of the dryer.*

How many are there?

Seven hungry space aliens slithered into the diner and ordered two dozen vanilla milkshakes.

How many hungry space aliens? *Seven!*

The students, **five freshmen and six sophomores**, braved Dr. Ribley's killer calculus exam.

How many students? *Eleven!*

The disorganized pile of books, **which contained seventeen overdue volumes from the library and five unread class texts**, blocked the doorway in Eli's dorm room.

How many books? *Twenty-two!*

Which one is it?

The **most unhealthy** item from the cafeteria is the steak sub, which will slime your hands with grease.

Which item from the cafeteria? Certainly *not* the one that will lower your cholesterol!

The cockroach ***eyeing your cookie*** has started to crawl this way.

Which cockroach? Not the one crawling up your leg but the *one who wants your cookie!*

The students ***who neglected to prepare for Mrs. Mauzy's English class*** hide in the cafeteria rather than risk their instructor's wrath.

Which students? Not the good students but *the lazy slackers*.

Know how to punctuate a series of adjectives.

To describe a noun fully, you might need to use two or more adjectives. Sometimes a series of adjectives requires commas, but sometimes it doesn't. What makes the difference?

If the adjectives are *coordinate*, you must use commas between them. If, on the other hand, the adjectives are *noncoordinate*, no commas are necessary. How do you tell the difference?

Coordinate adjectives can pass one of two tests. When you reorder the series or when you insert ***and*** between them, they still make sense. Look at the following example:

The ***tall, creamy, delicious*** milkshake melted on the counter while the inattentive waiter flirted with the pretty cashier.

Now read this revision:

The ***delicious, tall, creamy*** milkshake melted on the counter while the inattentive waiter flirted with the pretty cashier.

The series of adjectives still makes sense even though the order has changed. And if you insert ***and*** between the adjectives, you still have a logical sentence:

The ***tall and creamy and delicious*** milkshake melted on the counter while the inattentive waiter flirted with the pretty cashier.

Noncoordinate adjectives do *not* make sense when you reorder the series or when you insert ***and*** between them. Check out this example:

Jeanne's two fat Siamese cats hog the electric blanket on cold winter evenings.

If you switch the order of the adjectives, the sentence becomes gibberish:

Fat Siamese two Jeanne's cats hog the electric blanket on cold winter evenings.

Logic will also evaporate if you insert **and** between the adjectives.

Jeanne's and two and fat and Siamese cats hog the electric blanket on cold winter evenings.

Form **comparative** and **superlative** adjectives correctly.

To make comparisons, you will often need comparative or superlative adjectives. You use comparative adjectives if you are discussing *two* people, places, or things. You use superlative adjectives if you have *three or more* people, places, or things. Look at these two examples:

Stevie, a suck up who sits in the front row, has a **thicker** notebook than Nina, who never comes to class.

The **thinnest** notebook belongs to Mike, a computer geek who scans all notes and handouts and saves them on the hard drive of his laptop.

You can form comparative adjectives two ways. You can add **er** to the end of the adjective, or you can use **more** or **less** before it. Do *not*, however, do both! You violate the rules of grammar if you claim that you are **more taller**, **more smarter**, or **less faster** than your older brother Fred.

One-syllable words generally take **er** at the end, as in these examples:

Because Fuzz is a **smaller** cat than Buster, she loses the fights for tuna fish.

For dinner, we ordered a **bigger** pizza than usual so that we would have cold leftovers for breakfast.

Two-syllable words vary. Check out these examples:

Kelly is **lazier** than an old dog; he is perfectly happy spending an entire Saturday on the couch, watching old movies and napping.

The new suit makes Marvin **more handsome** than a movie star.

Use **more** or **less** before adjectives with three or more syllables:

Movies on our new flat-screen television are, thankfully, **less colorful**; we no longer have to tolerate the electric greens and nuclear pinks of the old unit.

Heather is **more compassionate** than anyone I know; she watches where she steps to avoid squashing a poor bug by accident.

You can form superlative adjectives two ways as well. You can add **est** to the end of the adjective, or you can use **most** or **least** before it. Do *not*, however, do both! You violate another grammatical rule if you claim that you are the **most brightest**, **most happiest**, or **least angriest** member of your family.

One-syllable words generally take **est** at the end, as in these examples:

These are the **tartest** lemon-roasted squid tentacles that I have ever eaten!

Nigel, the **tallest** member of the class, has to sit in the front row because he has bad eyes; the rest of us crane around him for a glimpse of the board.

Two-syllable words vary. Check out these examples:

Because Hector refuses to read directions, he made the **crispiest** mashed potatoes ever in the history of instant food.

Because Isaac has a crush on Ms. Orsini, his English teacher, he believes that she is the **most gorgeous** creature to walk the planet.

Use **most** or **least** before adjectives with three or more syllables:

The **most frustrating** experience of Desiree's day was arriving home to discover that the onion rings were missing from her drive-thru order.

The **least believable** detail of the story was that the space aliens had offered Eli a slice of pepperoni pizza before his release.



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