

Grammar: Adjectives and Adjective Clauses

An adjective is a word that describes a noun. Well-chosen, interesting, accurate adjectives can make your writing sparkle. Here is an overview of some details of adjective use you might have missed before.

-ed or -ing?

A large group of adjectives come from verbs. Those in past participle form (-ed for regular verbs) describe a noun that EXPERIENCES a feeling or state; those in gerund form (-ing) describe a noun that CAUSES a feeling or state.

A. I feel so <u>bored</u> right now.	a. The movie was too <u>boring</u> to watch.
B. Wait – I’m <u>confused</u> . Tell me again.	b. Calculus is <u>confusing</u> .
C. Do you want a <u>boiled</u> egg, or a scrambled one?	c. Be careful. That’s <u>boiling</u> hot water.

Exercise 3.5

Try to expand your vocabulary by figuring out good adjectives from this list of verbs.

exaggerate	frustrate	amuse
thrill	startle	soothe
oppose	engage	depress
conflict	worry	inspire

1. I just watched the best documentary about MLK. It was so _____.
2. I’m _____ about the situation; both sides have good points.
3. A good parent can deal with _____ situations, like a baby that just won’t stop crying.
4. I love roller coasters – they’re _____ !
5. The kids love this new math program. I’ve never seen them so _____.
6. Let’s not talk about politics. It’s too _____.
7. Fight off a cold by taking a _____ bath with a drop of eucalyptus oil.
8. The restaurant review is slightly _____, which makes it more _____.

Adjective Order

When using multiple adjectives to describe a single noun, follow this typical order:

Number	Your opinion	Size	Age	Shape	Color	Nationality	Material (often a noun)	Kind, use (often a noun)
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When using adjectives from different categories before a noun, there is no need for commas or conjunctions.

- ★ I have six adorable young Persian cats.
- ★ We keep tea in a little square metal box.
- ★ The bride wore an overpriced white silk wedding dress.
- ★ We saw several sleek new sports cars.

If the adjectives belong to the same category, we typically use commas between them.

- ★ You'll meet a tall, dark, handsome stranger.
- ★ I've got the handsomest, funniest, most charming husband of anyone I know.

If the adjectives describe different **parts** of the noun, use "and." If the adjectives **contradict** each other, use "but."

- ★ It's a red and black book.
- ★ We live in a concrete and glass house.
- ★ My brother is dating a loveable but annoying young lady.

Adjectives can also come after the noun. In this position, we usually use commas and a conjunction. Notice that *number*, *nationality*, *material* and *kind* sometimes cannot be in this position; also, the adjective order is relaxed.

- ★ My six Persian cats are adorable and young. // young and adorable.
- ★ The tea box is little, square and metal.
- ★ The silk wedding dress was overpriced and white. // white and overpriced.
- ★ The sports cars were sleek and new. // new and sleek.
- ★ My sister-in-law is loveable but annoying. // annoying but loveable.

It is also possible for a quality to be a **mix** of two adjectives. Typically, this **ONLY** occurs with colors. In this situation, use a hyphen.

- ★ I love the yellow-green color of new leaves.
- ★ She has shocking-pink hair and a pierced nose.
- ★ My car is blue-gray.

Ex. 3.6: Multiple Adjectives

Add commas and a conjunction (“and, but”) if needed.

1. He has (curly / red) hair.
2. The bark is (gray / rough).
3. The new employee is (young / bearded).
4. The sea is (freezing / rough).
5. It's a (glass / wood / modern) house.
6. I'm (cold / tired / hungry).
7. The lecturer offered a (fascinating / unlikely) theory,
8. We are seeking (talented, three, flexible) programmers.
9. Her (blue / harsh) hair is (distracting / pretty).
10. The officer's car was (green / gold).
11. We found a (cold / hungry / frightened) child outside the store.
12. We ran across the (black / rocky) beach to the (salt / vast / blue) sea.
13. Princess Di was (beloved / lonely); (insecure / beautiful).
14. Politics today is (infuriating / depressing / confusing).

More Adjectives; Noun Modifiers

Word forms – noun, verb, adjective and adverb – can be flexible in English. It's very common to see nouns acting as adjectives to describe another noun. We can see this in adjective order. After all, color words like “red, green, yellow” are both nouns AND adjectives, while materials like “wool, gold, metal” or purposes (wedding dress, sports car) are simply nouns. You are probably familiar with this idea:

- ★ A soup made of vegetables = Vegetable soup
- ★ Shoes for playing tennis = Tennis shoes
- ★ Cheese flavored with herbs = Herb cheese

The first noun acts exactly like an adjective. Notice that it is NEVER plural!

Here is another pattern. When combining a noun AND a verb to create an adjective, change the verb to a gerund form and join the noun and gerund with a hyphen:

- ★ The story will chill your bones. It's a bone-chilling story.
- ★ This new therapy saves lives. It's a life-saving therapy.
- ★ This dog has won prizes. She's a prize-winning dog.

Expressions with numbers – ages, weights, distances, times – follow this pattern. Again, the noun modifiers are NEVER plural. And notice that again, hyphens are used to connect a phrase.

- ★ a run of ten miles: a ten-mile run
- ★ a payment of one hundred dollars: a hundred-dollar payment
- ★ a flight lasting three hours: a three-hour flight

Think About It: What's the difference between a *hyphen* and a *dash*?

Ex. 3.7: Noun Modifiers

Create a new noun modifier or adjective using the underlined words.

1. Jewelry made from silver is: _____
2. A shop that sells toys is a: _____
3. A towel for the beach is a: _____
4. Lamps on the streets are: _____
5. A story about love is a: _____
6. A movie about spies is a: _____
7. Bread made with olives is: _____
8. A person who sells magazines is a: _____
9. Food for cats is: _____
10. A person who works in an office is an: _____
11. A child that's three years old is a: _____
12. A cruise that lasts two weeks is a: _____
13. A cake made of chocolate is a: _____
14. A flight that lasts 45 minutes is a: _____
15. A meeting that lasts two hours is a: _____
16. A movie that won awards is an: _____
17. A story that will warm your heart is a: _____
18. A report that breaks new ground is a: _____
19. An experience that will churn your stomach is a: _____
20. Information that will boggle your mind is: _____