Adjectives and Adverbs

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

Adjectives
Adjectives are words that describe or modify nouns and pronouns. They tell what kind, how many, or which one.

Location
Adjectives usually precede a noun or follow a linking verb.
EXAMPLES: She has dark hair. (Dark precedes the noun, hair.)
He is an intelligent person. (Intelligent precedes the noun, person.)
She looks happy. (Happy describes the pronoun, she.)

Adjectives in Comparisons
Comparisons are shown by adding –er or –est to the end of the word or more or the most before the adjective. A few adjectives, like good and bad, change form completely.

-ER/-EST: She is kind.
          She is kinder than Melissa. (comparative)
          She is the kindest person in the group. (superlative)

MORE/MOST Jane is intelligent.
          Jane is more intelligent than Victor. (comparative)
          Jane is the most intelligent student in the class. (superlative)

FORM CHANGE Apples are good.
          Apples are better than oranges. (comparative)
          Apples are the best afternoon snack. (superlative)

Articles as Adjectives
Articles (a, an, and the) are a subcategory of adjectives. For more information, see our handout Articles.

Order of Adjectives in a Sentence
When two or more adjectives modify a noun, they usually occur in the following order:
1. Determiner: (a, an, the, this, that, these, those), possessives (its, our), quantity words (several, three)
2. Adjective of evaluation: boring, disgusting, comfortable, cheap, heavy
3. Adjective describing size: little, big, huge
4. Adjective describing shape: round, square, long
5. Adjective describing age: new, young, old
6. Adjective describing color: green, red, blue
7. Adjective describing nationality: Asian, Italian
8. Adjective describing faith: Catholic, Muslim
9. Adjective describing material: metal, wooden, plastic
10. Noun used as an adjective: kitchen cabinet, writing desk

EXAMPLES: The huge, majestic, snow-covered mountains are visible from our room.
          A delicious, inexpensive, Italian meal makes me happy.
          He was a consistent, hardworking, invaluable player.

Note: It is usually most effective to find one or two adjectives that precisely capture your meaning than to use long lists of adjectives.
Adjectives and Adverbs

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

Adverbs
Adverbs describe verbs, other adverbs, and adjectives, as well as whole clauses.

Use of Adverbs
Adverbs often answer the questions Where?, When?, How?, and To what extent?.

EXAMPLES:
- He wrote nearby. (Where did he write? Nearby.)
- He wrote yesterday. (When did he write? Yesterday.)
- He wrote carefully. (How did he write? Carefully.)
- He wrote a draft that was almost complete. (To what extent? Almost complete.)

Formation of Adverbs
Adverbs are often formed by adding the suffix -ly to an adjective.

EXAMPLES:
- Unfortunately, she left differently than he did.
- She quickly picked up the book and curiously began reading it.

Some adverbs are not derived from adjectives.

EXAMPLES:
- Ryan liked England a lot.
- The dog was fat because it loved food so much.
- The author writes well.

Choosing Adjectives and Adverbs
Students sometimes use an adjective where an adverb is needed, or vice versa. Remember that adjectives modify nouns and pronouns, and adverbs modify verbs, adverbs, or other adjectives.

INCORRECT: Brandon and Melissa took the joke too serious. (Serious is intended to modify took, so an adverb—seriously—is needed in its place.)
CORRECT: Brandon and Melissa took the joke too seriously.

INCORRECT: I performed good on the test. (Good is intended to modify the verb performed, so an adverb—well—is needed in its place.)
CORRECT: I performed well on the test.

In some instances, your choice of an adjective or an adverb changes the meaning of the sentence.

EXAMPLES: The dog smells bad. (This sentence is saying that the dog stinks.)
- The dog smells badly. (This sentence is saying that the dog has a poor sense of smell.)