

University of M'sila

Department of English
First Year LMD Students

Course: Grammar
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LESSON THREE: ADJECTIVES

Adjectives are words that describe or modify nouns (people, places, things, or animals) or pronouns. They describe the noun by telling us its size, shape, age, colour, etc. Adjectives usually come before the noun or pronoun, or sometimes they can come after it. The following are the subsections of this lesson:

1. Agreement
2. Kinds of Adjectives
3. Position of Adjectives
4. Participles used as adjectives
5. The + adjective with a plural meaning
6. Order of adjectives of quality
7. Comparison of Adjectives

1. Agreement

Adjectives in English have **the same form for singular and plural, masculine and feminine nouns**:

a good boy, good boys a good girl, good girls

The only exceptions are the **demonstrative adjectives this and that**, which change to **these and those** before plural nouns: *this cat, these cats that man, those men*

2. Kinds of Adjectives

The different kinds of adjectives are discussed in detail under their respective sections:

1. Descriptive adjective or adjective of quality: Descriptive adjectives are the most numerous of the different types of adjectives. These adjectives describe nouns that refer to action, state, or quality (careless, dangerous, excited, sad, black, white, big, small, long, fat, English, Mediterranean, three-cornered).e.g.,

dangerous chemicals green vegetables a square box a big house a tall tree a cold morning a true story Mediterranean country.

2. Adjective of quantity: An adjective of quantity tells us the **number (how many)** or **amount (how much)** of a noun as **some, any, no, little/few, many, much, one, twenty**

He has eaten three apples. I don't have much money. There is so much wine for the guests. This long, thin centipede has many legs.

3. Demonstrative adjective: A demonstrative adjective (**this, that, these, those**) shows the noun it modifies is singular or plural and whether the position of the noun is near or far from the person who is speaking or writing. A demonstrative adjective also points out a fact about the noun.

This red balloon is mine and those three yellow ones are yours. This cute baby is his brother. That cute baby is his sister. These two fat cats have tails, but that thin cat doesn't have a tail.

4. Possessive adjective: A possessive adjective expresses possession of a noun by someone or something. Possessive adjectives are the same as possessive pronouns. All the possessive adjectives are listed in the following table:

Possessive adjectives/pronouns	
Singular	Plural
my	our
your	your

his	their
her	their
its	their

Examples of possessive adjectives/pronouns:

*I spent **my** afternoon cleaning the toilet. This must be **your** cap. **His** arms have a few tattoos.
Its skin is dry and rough. **Our** grandmothers were classmates.*

3. Position of Adjectives

Adjectives appear in different positions in a sentence. The two positions we often encounter are before a noun and after a linking verb which comes after a noun.

(1) The adjective that comes before a noun is called an “attributive adjective”: The attributive adjective modifies the noun that follows it. There can be more than one adjective appearing side-by-side to modify the same noun. **Examples:**

*a **fresh** fish a **small** tree a **long** dress a **square** box a **beautiful** house.*

More than one adjective can come before a noun. **Examples:**

*an **ugly old** witch a **funny little** clown a **tall young** manager a **big powerful** sound.*

(2) The adjective that comes after a noun is called a “predicative adjective”: A predicative adjective says something about the subject of the sentence. In the following sentence, the subject is “the bulls” and the adjective “black” modifies the subject. The adjective is joined to the subject by a verb “look”, a **linking verb**. Linking verbs are used here as they connect the subject with the adjective that describes it. Examples of linking verb include all forms of **be (am, is, are, was, were)** and other verbs such as *grow, remain, sound, taste, look, appear, feel, get (= become), keep, make, smell, turn*.

Adjectives that come after **the BE-verb**. **Examples:**

*He **is** thin. We **are** hungry. She **was** tired after work. They **were** friendly towards me.*

Adjectives that come after other **linking verbs**. **Examples:**

*The beef **tasted** delicious. She **grew** bored being alone. The question **sounds** silly.
The child **remained** silent when questioned.*

An adjective can take up any position in a sentence, preferably close to the noun that it describes. More than one adjective can appear in a sentence, and we can make the two or more adjectives describe the same noun. The adjectives are in bold in the following sentences.

*The **pretty** girl is **angry** with her boyfriend.
The **warm** air is **thick** with dust.
His **big** house must be **expensive** to maintain.*

Use of and :

With **attributive** adjectives **and** is used chiefly when there are two or more adjectives of colour. It is then placed before the last of these:

*a **green and brown** carpet a **red, white and blue** flag*

With **predicative** adjectives **and** is placed between the last two:

*The day **was** cold, wet and windy.*

4. Participles used as adjectives

Both present participles (**ing**) and past participles (**ed**) can be used as adjectives. Adjectives derived from verbs are formed by adding **-ing** or **-ed** to the verbs. Care must be taken not to confuse them. Present participle adjectives, *amusing, boring, tiring etc* , are **active and mean ‘having this effect’**. Past participle adjectives, *amused, horrified, tired etc.*, are **passive and mean ‘affected in this way’**. **Examples:**

an **infuriating** woman (*She made us furious*)
 an **infuriated** woman (*Something had made her furious.*)
 We need to get more young people **interested** in the subject.
 We need to make the subject more **interesting** to more young people.
 We were totally **amazed** by the brilliance of the player.
 What an **amazing** player he was.
 She was quite **annoyed** at the way he behaved.
 She found his behaviour quite **annoying**.

5. The + adjective with a plural meaning

Some adjectives are used to describe groups of people. Each of these groups follows the determiner **the** (definite article). There are **the blind, the deaf, the elderly, the homeless, the old, the rich, the sick, the young**, etc. These adjectives describe the human character or condition and are used to represent a class of persons. These expressions have a plural meaning; they take a plural verb and the pronoun is **they**.

Examples:

The injured were in the thousands. **The disabled** were let in free. **The French** like to eat well.
 There seems to have no plans to provide cheap housing for **the homeless**.

the can be used in the same way with **national adjectives** ending in **ch** or **sh**:

the Dutch the Spanish the Welsh

and can be used similarly with **national adjectives** ending in **se** or **ss**:

the Burmese the Chinese the Japanese the Swiss

the + adjective can occasionally have **a singular** meaning:

the accused (person) the unexpected (thing)

6. Order of adjectives of quality

A Several variations are possible (this order is not fixed), but a fairly usual order of adjectives is:

1. **Opinion:** beautiful, boring, stupid, delicious, useful, lovely, comfortable
2. **Size:** big, small, tall, huge, tiny
3. **Shape / Weight / Length:** round, square, circular, skinny, fat, heavy, straight, long, short.
4. **Age:** old, young, new, ancient, antique
5. **Colour:** green, white, blue, reddish, purple
6. **Origin:** American, British, Italian, eastern, Australian, Chilean
7. **Material:** What is the thing made? gold, wooden, silk, paper, synthetic, cotton, woollen
8. **Purpose:** What is it for? These adjectives often end in -ing as *walking stick, riding boots*).

Examples:

A big fat dog.

An interesting old Indian rug.

A striped silk shirt

Some comfortable black sleeping bags

Four small round wooden tables

Those funny little old men

	Opinion	Size	Age	Shape	Colour	Origin	Material	Purpose	
a	silly		young			English			man
a		huge		round			metal		bowl
a		small			red			sleeping	bag

7. Comparison of Adjectives

When we compare two or more nouns, we make use of **comparative adjectives** and **superlative adjectives**. We use the following three forms of comparison when we compare two or more nouns.

1. The Positive Form: We use the **positive form** to describe a noun or to compare two equal things or persons. With the positive form of the adjective, we use **as ... as** in the affirmative and **not as/not so ... as** in the negative. **Examples:**

*My uncle is **as bald as** a cue ball.*

*His head is **as big as** my head.*

*His ex-wife is **not as/so charming as** his wife-to-be.*

*Your coffee is **not as/so good as** the coffee my mother makes*

2. The Comparative and Superlative Forms:

A) **One-syllable adjectives** form their comparative and superlative by adding **'er'** to make the comparative form and **'est'** to make the superlative form:

Bright brighter brightest

Adjectives ending in **'e'** add **r** and **st**:

brave braver bravest

Here are some spelling changes. If there is one vowel followed by one consonant at the end of the adjective, we often double the consonant.

wet → wetter / wettest

big → bigger / biggest

hot → hotter / hottest

thin → thinner / thinnest

If the adjective ends in **'y'**, this often changes to **'i'**.

dry → drier / driest

B) **Adjectives of three or more syllables** form their comparative and superlative by putting **more** to make the comparative form and **most** to make the superlative form:

interested more interested most interested

frightening more frightening most frightening

C) **Adjectives of two syllables** follow **one or other of the above rules**.

Those ending in **ful** or **re** usually take **more** and **most**:

doubtful more doubtful most doubtful

obscure more obscure most obscure

Some adjectives with two syllables are only used or are most commonly used with **more/less** and **most/least**, particularly **participle adjectives** (e.g. **pleased, worried, boring**), **adjectives ending in -ful and -less** (e.g. **careful, careless**); **afraid, alike, alert, ashamed, alone, aware**; and also **cautious, certain, complex, confident, eager, exact, formal, frequent, modern, recent**.

Most other adjectives with two syllables can take either form, but those ending in **er, y** or **ly** usually add **er, est**:

clever cleverer cleverest

pretty prettier prettiest (note that the y becomes i)

silly sillier silliest

1. With the **comparative** we use **than** to compare **two unequal nouns** . :

*The new tower blocks are much **higher than** the old buildings.*

*He makes **fewer mistakes than** you (do).*

*He is **stronger than** I expected.*

*A hen's egg is **bigger than** a pigeon's egg.
Our fingers are **longer than** our toes.*

When the same verb is required before and after **than/as** we can use an auxiliary for the second verb:
*I earn **less than** he **does**. (less than he earns)*

The same tense need not be used in both clauses:
*He **knows more than** I **did** at his age*

2. With the **superlative** when we compare **three or more nouns**, we use **the in/of**.

*The **youngest** of the family was the **most successful**.
My great grandfather is **the oldest one in** the family.
She has **the prettiest face in** the whole school.
His head is the **biggest in** the family.*

Relative clause is useful especially with a perfect tense:
*It/This was **the worst film (that) he had ever seen**.*

Note: **most** + **adjective**, without **the**, means “**very**”. *You are **most kind** means you are **very kind**. **Most** meaning “**very**” is used mainly with adjectives of **two or more syllables** *annoying, apologetic, disobedient, encouraging, exciting, helpful important, misleading* etc.*

3. **Irregular comparisons:**

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative
<i>bad</i>	<i>worse</i>	<i>worst</i>
<i>far</i>	<i>farther</i>	<i>farthest (of distance only)</i>
<i>further</i>		<i>furthest (used more widely; see F, G)</i>
<i>good</i>	<i>better</i>	<i>best</i>
<i>little</i>	<i>less</i>	<i>least</i>
<i>many/much</i>	<i>more</i>	<i>most</i>
<i>old</i>	<i>elder</i>	<i>eldest (of people only)</i>
<i>older</i>		<i>oldest (of people and things)</i>

4. **Difference between farther/farthest and further/furthest:**

Both forms can be **used of distances**:

*York is **farther/further** than Lincoln or Selby.
York is **the farthest/furthest** town*

Further can also be used, mainly with abstract nouns, to mean ‘**additional/extra**’:

***Further** supplies will soon be available.*

***Further** discussion/debate would be pointless.*

Similarly: **further enquiries/delays/demands/information/instructions**

