

The Adverb

Recognize an *adverb* when you see one.

Adverbs tweak the meaning of verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, and clauses. Read, for example, this sentence:

Our basset hound Bailey sleeps on the living room floor.

Is Bailey a sound sleeper, curled into a tight ball? Or is he a fitful sleeper, his paws twitching while he dreams? The addition of an adverb adjusts the meaning of the verb **sleeps** so that the reader has a clearer picture:

Our basset hound Bailey sleeps **peacefully** on the living room floor.

Adverbs can be single words, or they can be phrases or clauses. Adverbs answer one of these four questions: *How? When? Where?* and *Why?*

Here are some *single-word* examples:

Lenora **rudely** grabbed the last chocolate cookie.

The adverb **rudely** fine-tunes the verb **grabbed**.

Tyler stumbled in the **completely** dark kitchen.

The adverb **completely** fine-tunes the adjective **dark**.

Roxanne **very** happily accepted the ten-point late penalty to work on her research essay one more day.

The adverb **very** fine-tunes the adverb **happily**.

Surprisingly, the restroom stalls had toilet paper.

The adverb **surprisingly** modifies the entire main clause that follows.

Many single-word adverbs end in **ly**. In the examples above, you saw **peacefully**, **rudely**, **completely**, **happily**, and **surprisingly**. Not all **ly** words are adverbs, however. **Lively**, **lonely**, and **lovely** are *adjectives* instead, answering the questions *What kind?* or *Which one?*

Many single-word adverbs have no specific ending, such as **next**, **not**, **often**, **seldom**, and **then**. If you are uncertain whether a word is an adverb or not, use a dictionary to determine its part of speech.

Adverbs can also be multi-word phrases and clauses. Here are some examples:

At 2 a.m., a bat flew **through Deidre's open bedroom window**.

The prepositional phrase **at 2 a.m.** indicates *when* the event happened. The second prepositional phrase, **through Deidre's open bedroom window**, describes *where* the creature traveled.

With a fork, George thrashed the raw eggs **until they foamed**.

The subordinate clause **until they foamed** describes *how* George prepared the eggs.

Sylvia emptied the carton of milk into the sink **because the expiration date had long passed**.

The subordinate clause **because the expiration date had long passed** describes *why* Sylvia poured out the milk.

Avoid an adverb when a single, stronger word will do.

Many readers believe that adverbs make sentences bloated and flabby. When you can replace a two-word combination with a more powerful, single word, do so!

For example, don't write **drink quickly** when you mean **gulp**, or **walk slowly** when you mean **saunter**, or **very hungry** when you mean **ravenous**.

Form comparative and superlative adverbs correctly.

To make comparisons, you will often need comparative or superlative adverbs. You use comparative adverbs—**more** and **less**—if you are discussing *two* people, places, or things.

You use superlative adverbs—**most** and **least**—if you have *three or more* people, places, or things. Look at these two examples:

Beth loves green vegetables, so she eats broccoli **more frequently** than her brother Daniel does.

Among the members of her family, Beth eats pepperoni pizza the **least often**.

Don't use an adjective when you need an adverb instead.

You will often hear people say, "Anthony is **real** smart" or "This pizza sauce is **real** salty."

Real is an adjective, so it cannot modify another adjective like **smart** or **salty**. What people should say is "Anthony is **really** smart" or "This pizza sauce is **really** salty."

If you train yourself to add the extra *ly* syllable when you speak, you will likely remember it when you write, where its absence will otherwise cost you points or respect!

Realize that an adverb is *not* part of the verb.

Some verbs require up to four words to complete the tense. A multi-part verb has a base or *main* part as well as auxiliary or helping verbs with it.

When a short adverb such as **also**, **never**, or **not** interrupts, it is still an adverb, not part of the verb. Read these examples:

For his birthday, Frank would **also** like a jar of dill pickles.

Would like = verb; **also** = adverb.

After that dreadful casserole you made last night, Julie will **never** eat tuna or broccoli again.

Will eat = verb; **never** = adverb.

Despite the approaching deadline, Sheryl-Ann has **not** started her research essay.

Has started = verb; **not** = adverb.



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