

Adverbs

Adverbs describe or give more specific information about other words. Adverbs are often single words, but they can also be word groups—phrases or clauses. Adverbs answer many different kinds of questions:

They tell when and express frequency.

They tell where.

They tell why.

They tell in what manner, or how something happens.

They show how much—degree or intensity.

They create negatives.

They express a viewpoint or comment.

later, often, seldom, sometimes, when class is over outside, upstairs, in the car

to win the game, to catch a bus, since he works late

gradually, rapidly, inevitably

just, very, almost, completely

hardly, rarely, not, never

seriously, personally, certainly

An adverb can describe a verb, an adjective, or another adverb:

*We will eat **later** (**later** tells when about the verb *will eat*).*

*It was a **pretty** expensive restaurant (**pretty** describes to what degree about the adjective *expensive*).*

*The waiter moved **very quickly** to take our order (**very** describes to what degree about the adverb **quickly**, which in turn tells how about the verb *moved*).*

Adverb placement

There are many rules for where to place adverbs in a sentence. Below are some common rules for adverb placement. Consult an English language or ESL guide for more detailed information.

1. The adverb *not* follows the verb *to be*, but for action verbs, it comes between the auxiliary and the main verb. *Not* precedes *always*, *usually*, and *often*.

*I am **not** amused.*

*They did **not** go to the football game*

*He does **not always** finish his homework.*

*She doesn't **usually** bring her lunch.*

*They do **not often** travel together.*

2. When there is an auxiliary (helping) verb, negative adverbs and adverbs of frequency come between the auxiliary and main verb:

*I do **not** care which movie we see.*

*We have **usually** avoided traveling in December.*

*I will **never** do that again!*

3. Adverbs of frequency (such as *always*, *never*, *sometimes*, *often*) usually come before the main verb.

*She **always** drives fast.*

*We **never** got that bill.*

4. *Sometimes* and *often* can also appear at the beginning or end of a sentence:

*We **sometimes** talk on the phone (or, **Sometimes** we talk on the phone, or We talk on the phone **sometimes**).*

They **often** videochat (or, **Often** they videochat, or They videochat **often**).

5. However, when the verb is *to be* (*am, is, are, was, were, been*), adverbs of frequency usually follow the verb:

He is **always** late for work.
The road signs are **sometimes** confusing.
He is **occasionally** annoying.

6. Adverbs should not come between a verb and a direct object:

He applied the paint **smoothly** (or, He **smoothly** applied the paint.)
Not this: ~~He applied smoothly the paint.~~

His mother poured the milk **slowly** (or, His mother **slowly** poured the milk.)
Not this: ~~His mother poured slowly the milk.~~

Enough, too, too much, too many

The adverb *enough* (meaning *to the required degree or extent*—this shows a positive circumstance) comes after the word it describes:

My teacher isn't patient **enough** (describes the adjective).
She ran quickly **enough** to win the race (describes the adverb).
He cares **enough** to call every weekend (describes the verb).

The adverb *too* (meaning *to an excessive extent*—this shows a negative or undesirable circumstance—) comes before the word it describes:

It was **too** dark to see (describes the adjective).
He's driving **too** slowly (describes the adverb).

To show an undesirable excess, *too much* is used with non-count nouns like *furniture, water, or violence*. *Too many* is used with count nouns like *tables, glasses, or wars*.

The room was cluttered with **too much** furniture.
You set out **too many** glasses of water.

Viewpoint adverbs

Viewpoint adverbs are different from other adverbs because they modify an entire clause, not just a verb, adjective or adverb within the clause. They express an attitude or a comment on the clause:

You should **certainly** go to the concert.
Seriously, don't be late for your interview.
He's acting silly, **obviously**.

Contributed by Rosemary McKeever

