

# THE ADJECTIVE

## Recognize an adjective when you find one.

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Adjectives describe **nouns** by answering one of these three questions: *What kind is it? How many are there? Which one is it?* An adjective can be a single word, a **phrase**, or a **clause**.

### WHAT KIND IS IT?

Dan decided that the **green** bread would make an **unappetizing** sandwich.

What kind of bread? **Green!** What kind of sandwich? **Unappetizing!** (Single-word adjectives)

A friend **with a fat wallet** will never want for weekend shopping partners.

What kind of friend? One **with a fat wallet!** (Phrase as adjective)

A towel **that is still warm from the dryer** is more comforting than a hot fudge sundae.

What kind of towel? One **that is still warm from the dryer.** (Clause as adjective)

### HOW MANY ARE THERE?

**Seven** hungry space aliens slithered into the diner and ordered vanilla milkshakes.

How many hungry space aliens? **Seven!** (Single-word adjective)

The students, **five freshmen and six sophomores**, braved Professor Ribley's killer calculus exam.

How many students? Eleven—**five freshman and six sophomores!** (Phrase as adjective)

Without an iota of remorse, Eli dumped the pile of books, **all seventeen of which were overdue**, onto the welcome desk at the library.

How many books? A pile of *seventeen, all of which were overdue!* (Clause as adjective)

### WHICH ONE IS IT?

The **unhealthiest** item from the cafeteria is the steak sub, which will slime your hands with grease.

Which item from the cafeteria? The *unhealthiest!* (Single-word adjective)

The cockroach **eyeing your cookie** has started to crawl this way.

Which cockroach? Not the one crawling up your leg but the one *eyeing your cookie!* (Phrase as adjective)

The students **who neglected to prepare for Professor Mauzy's English class** hide in the cafeteria rather than risk their instructor's wrath.

Which students? Not the good ones but the students *who neglected to prepare for Professor Mauzy's English class.* (Clause as adjective)

## Know how to punctuate a series of adjectives.

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To describe a **noun** fully, you might need to use two or more adjectives. Sometimes you must separate a series of adjectives with **commas**, but other times you do not. What makes the difference?

If the adjectives are *coordinate*, you must use commas between them. If, on the other hand, the adjectives are *noncoordinate*, no commas are necessary. How do you tell the difference?

### COORDINATE ADJECTIVES

Coordinate adjectives can pass one of two tests: 1) When you reorder the series or 2) when you insert **and** between the adjectives, the sentence still makes sense.

Read this example:

The **tall, creamy, delicious** milkshake melted on the counter while the inattentive waiter flirted with the pretty cashier.

Now read this revision:

The **delicious, tall, creamy** milkshake melted on the counter while the inattentive waiter flirted with the pretty cashier.

The sentence still makes sense even though the order of the adjectives has changed.

And if you insert **and** between the adjectives, you still have a logical sentence:

The **tall and creamy and delicious** milkshake melted on the counter while the inattentive waiter flirted with the pretty cashier.

## **NONCOORDINATE ADJECTIVES**

Noncoordinate adjectives do *not* make sense when you reorder the series or when you insert **and** between them.

Consider this example:

**Jeanne's two fat Siamese** cats hog the electric blanket on cold winter evenings.

If you switch the order of the adjectives, the sentence becomes gibberish:

**Fat Siamese two Jeanne's** cats hog the electric blanket on cold winter evenings.

Logic will also evaporate if you insert **and** between the adjectives.

**Jeanne's and two and fat and Siamese** cats hog the electric blanket on cold winter evenings.

## Form comparative and superlative adjectives correctly.

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To make comparisons, you will often need comparative or superlative adjectives. You use comparative adjectives if you are discussing *two* people, places, or things. You use superlative adjectives if you have *three or more* people, places, or things.

Here are two examples:

Stevie, a suck up who sits in the front row, has a **thicker** notebook than Nina, who never comes to class.

The **thinnest** notebook belongs to Mike, a computer geek who scans all notes and handouts and saves them in the cloud.

### COMPARATIVE ADJECTIVES

You can form comparative adjectives two ways. You can add ***er*** to the end of the adjective, or you can use ***more*** or ***less*** before it. Do not, however, do both! You violate the rules of grammar if you claim that you are ***more taller***, ***more smarter***, or ***less faster*** than your older brother Fred.

One-syllable adjectives generally take ***er*** at the end, as in these examples:

Because Fuzz is a **smaller** cat than Buster, she loses the fights for tuna fish.

For dinner, we ordered a **bigger** pizza than usual so that we would have cold leftovers for breakfast.

Two-syllable adjectives vary. Consider these examples:

Kelly is **lazier** than an old dog; he is perfectly happy spending an entire Saturday on the couch, watching old movies and napping.

The new suit makes Marvin **more handsome** than a movie star.

Use ***more*** or ***less*** before adjectives with three or more syllables:

Movies on our new flat-screen television are, thankfully, **less colorful**; we no longer have to tolerate the electric greens and nuclear pinks of the old unit.

Heather is **more compassionate** than anyone I know; she watches where she steps to avoid squashing a poor bug by accident.

## **SUPERLATIVE ADJECTIVES**

You can form superlative adjectives two ways: either by adding ***est*** to the end of the adjective or by using ***most*** or ***least*** before it. Do not, however, do both! You violate another grammatical rule if you claim that you are the ***most brightest***, ***most happiest***, or ***least angriest*** member of your family.

One-syllable adjectives generally take ***est*** at the end, as in these examples:

These are the **tartest** lemon-roasted squid tentacles that I have ever eaten!

Nigel, the **tallest** member of the class, must sit in the front row because he has bad eyes; the rest of us crane around him for a glimpse of the board.

Two-syllable adjectives vary. Read these examples:

Since Hector refuses to read directions, he made the **crispiest** mashed potatoes in the history of instant food.

Because Isaac has a crush on Professor Orsini, his English teacher, he believes that she is the **most gorgeous** creature to walk the planet.

Use ***most*** or ***least*** before adjectives with three or more syllables:

The **most frustrating** experience of Desiree's day was arriving home to discover that the onion rings were missing from her drive-thru order.

The **least believable** detail of the story was that the space aliens had offered Eli a slice of pepperoni pizza before his release.

