

## Placement of adjectives and adverbs

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Adjectives modify nouns or pronouns; adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. Both native and nonnative speakers encounter problems in the use of adjectives and adverbs. For nonnative speakers, the placement of adjectives and adverbs can also be troublesome.

### Placement of adjectives

No doubt you have already learned that in English adjectives usually precede the nouns they modify and that they may also appear following linking verbs.

Janine wore a *new* necklace. Janine's necklace was *new*.

When adjectives pile up in front of a noun, however, you may sometimes have difficulty arranging them. English is quite particular about the order of cumulative adjectives, those not separated by commas.

Janine was wearing a *beautiful antique silver* necklace [not  
*silver antique beautiful* necklace].

**NOTE:** Long strings of cumulative adjectives tend to be awkward. As a rule, use no more than two or three of them between the article (or other noun marker) and the noun modified. Here are several examples:

a beautiful old pine table	Susan's large round painting
two enormous French urns	some small blue medicine
an exotic purple jungle flower	bottles

The chart on the next page shows the order in which cumulative adjectives ordinarily appear in front of the noun they modify. This list is just a general guide; don't be surprised when you encounter exceptions.

### Placement of adverbs

Adverbs modifying verbs appear in various positions: at the beginning or end of the sentence, before or after the verb, or between a helping verb and its main verb.

*Slowly*, we drove along the rain-slick road.  
Mia handled the teapot *very carefully*.  
Martin *always* wins our tennis matches.  
Christina is *rarely* late for our lunch dates.  
My daughter has *often* spoken of you.

An adverb may not, however, be placed between a verb and its direct object.

▶ Mother wrapped ~~carefully~~ the gift <sup>carefully.</sup>

The adverb *carefully* may be placed at the beginning or at the end of this sentence or before the verb. It cannot appear after the verb because the verb is followed by a direct object, *the gift*.

(continued)

## Usual order of cumulative adjectives

### ARTICLE OR OTHER NOUN MARKER

a, an, the, her, Joe's, two, many, some

### EVALUATIVE WORD

attractive, dedicated, delicious, ugly, disgusting

### SIZE

large, enormous, small, little

### LENGTH OR SHAPE

long, short, round, square

### AGE

new, old, young, antique

### COLOR

yellow, blue, crimson

### NATIONALITY

French, Scandinavian, Vietnamese

### RELIGION

Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim

### MATERIAL

silver, walnut, wool, marble

### NOUN/ADJECTIVE

tree (as in *tree* house), kitchen (as in *kitchen* table)

### THE NOUN MODIFIED

house, sweater, bicycle, bread, woman, priest