


# Adjective or Adverb?

## Basic Rules:

- 1. Adjectives Modify Nouns. Adverbs Modify Verbs, Adjectives, and other Adverbs. You can recognize adverbs easily because many of them are formed by adding the suffix “-ly” onto an adjective.**

  
Richard is *careless*.

Here *careless* is an adjective that modifies the proper noun *Richard*.

  
Richard talks *carelessly*.

Here *carelessly* is an adverb that modifies the verb *talks*.

- 2. Adverbs cannot modify nouns.**

~~I have a quietly dog.~~

The correct sentence should read: “I have a quiet dog.”

~~I have a happily dog.~~

The correct sentence should read: “I have a happy dog.”

- 3. Adjectives cannot modify verbs.**

~~He talks careless about his wife.~~

The correct sentence should read “He talks carelessly about his wife.”

~~He is breathing normal again.~~

The correct sentence should read “He is breathing normally again”

- 4. An adjective always follows a form of the verb *to be* when it modifies the noun before the verb.**

  
I was *nervous*.

Here *nervous* is an adjective and “was” is the form of *to be*.

  
She has been *sick* all week.

Here *sick* is an adjective and “has been” is the form of *to be*.

- 5. An adjective always follows a sense verb or a verb of appearance (i.e. feel, taste, smell, sound, look, appear, and seem) when it modifies the noun before the verb.**

  
Castor oil tastes *awful*.

Here *awful* is an adjective that modifies the noun *oil*.

Using the adverb *awfully* would not make sense here because it would mean that the oil is bad at performing the act of tasting.

  
This apple smells *sweet*.

Here *sweet* is an adjective that modifies the noun *apple*.

Using the adverb *sweetly* would not make sense here because it would mean that the apple performs the act of smelling things in a sweet manner.

## Avoiding Common Errors

### Good or Well?

1. *Good* is an adjective, so you do **not** *do good* or *live good*. Remember, though, that an adjective follows sense-verbs and be-verbs, so you **do** *feel good, look good, smell good*, etc.
2. *Well* can function as either an adverb or an adjective. When *well* is used as an adverb, you *do well* and *live well*. When *well* is used as an adjective, it means “not sick” or “in good health.” For this specific use of *well*, it is correct to say you *feel well* or *are well*—for example, when recovering from an illness. When not used in this health-related sense, however, *well* functions as an adverb; for example, “I did *well* on my exam.”

### Bad or Badly?

When you want to describe how you feel, you should use an adjective. (Why? *Feel* is a sense verb; see rule #5 on the other side). So you would say: “I feel *bad*.” Saying you feel badly would be like saying you play football badly. It would mean that you are unable to feel, as though your hands were numb.

### Double Negatives

In English, only one negative is ever used at a time. Adverbs such as *scarcely* and *hardly* already carry a negative connotation and to add another negative is redundant.

~~They found scarcely no animals on the island.~~

The correct sentence should read “They found scarcely any animals on the island.”

~~Hardly no one came to the party.~~

The correct sentence should read “Hardly anyone came to the party.”

### Sure or Surely?

*Sure* is an adjective. *Surely* is an adverb.

I am *sure* that you were there.

Here *sure* is an adjective that modifies the pronoun *I*.

He is *surely* ready to take on this project.

Here *surely* is an adverb that modifies the adjective *ready*.

### Real or Really?

*Real* is an adjective. *Really* is an adverb.

She did *really* well on that test.

Here *really* is an adverb that modifies the adverb *well*.

Popular culture proposes imaginary solutions to *real* problems.

Here *real* is an adjective that modifies the noun *problems*.

### Near or Nearly?

*Near* can function as a verb, adverb, adjective, or preposition. *Nearly* is used as an adverb to mean “in a close manner” or “almost but not quite.”

We are *nearly* finished with this project.

Here *nearly* is an adverb that modifies the verb *finished*.

I'll be seeing you in the *near* future.

Here *near* is an adjective that modifies the noun *future*.

The cat crept *near*.

Here *near* is an adverb of place that modifies the verb *crept*.