

## Modifiers

Adjectives and adverbs are included here; the distinction is collapsing in English but is still available.

Adjectives provide more information about nouns or pronouns:

- About nouns: blue sky, blue cheese, blue bird (not to be confused with bluebird, a type of bird)
- About pronouns (often happens with predicate adjectives): she is tall

Adjectives come in 3 levels of comparison in English: positive (green, slow, good), comparative (greener, slower, better), superlative (greenest, slowest, best).<sup>1</sup> Note that most are regular and some are irregular. Longer adjectives usually use 'more' and 'most': compassionate, more compassionate, most compassionate. Some short ones do: funner and more fun are both acceptable, but 'funner' and 'funnest' can't be used when 'fun' is a noun. (But if you have a grammarian who doesn't like the distinction between noun 'fun' and adjective 'fun', just use more/most all of the time).

- He's the funnest person here/ the most fun person here; linguists have the most fun

Adverbs provide more information about verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, and sentences:

- About verbs: run quickly, think deeply, search harder, grow slowly, boldly go (the order matters and can change the meaning by changing the scope of modification—they usually eat quickly in the basement; they quickly eat, usually in the basement: as in this example, commas can sometimes help disambiguate the elements the adverbs are describing)
- About adjectives: very slow, too much, so bad, not blue
- About other adverbs: very slowly, too quickly, so boldly, not deeply
- About sentences: Hopefully, we'll be able to read that book this weekend; usually, we read books on the weekend

Adverbs can have positives, comparatives, and superlatives, formed with more and most: quickly, more quickly, most quickly.

Neither adverbs nor adjectives have entirely predictable forms; many adverbs distinguish themselves from adjectives with -ly, but not always, and there is a set of adjectives that end in -ly, such as worldly and friendly. So if one wants to make 'worldly' and 'friendly' into adverbs, the most correct (and pedantic) forms are 'wordlily' and 'friendlily'.<sup>2</sup> 'Well' as an adjective means healthy; 'well' as an adverb means adequately or thoroughly.

The information is the important piece: adjectives → nouns, pronouns; adverbs → verbs, adjectives, adverbs, sentences.

- Mildred is the writer with the shortest pencil ('with the shortest pencil' tells us about the writer)
- They always eat in the basement after the baseball game ('in the basement' and 'after the baseball game' tell us about the eating); prepositional phrases that give adverbial information usually give information about time or location: in the basement, after the baseball game.

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<sup>1</sup> I keep trying for more, but nobody seems to be taking them up: This is the most better cupcake. It was a more better paragraph. It was the better safest option.

<sup>2</sup> Barry Smith at SUNY Buffalo has a nice collection of '-lily' adverbs.