**LECTURE 8.1**

**ADVERBS**

An adverb is a word that modifies (describes) a [verb](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/verbs/) (he sings loudly), an [adjective](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/adjective/) (very tall), another adverb (ended too quickly), or even a whole sentence (Fortunately, I had brought an umbrella). Adverbs often end in –ly, but some (such as fast) look exactly the same as their adjective counterparts.

* Tom Longboat did not run **badly**.
* Tom is **very** tall.
* The race finished **too** quickly.
* **Fortunately,** Lucy recorded Tom’s win.

It’s easy to identify adverbs in these sentences.

## Adverbs and verbs

Adverbs often modify verbs. This means that they describe the way an action is happening.

* Phillip sings **loudly** in the shower.
* My cat waits **impatiently** for his food.
* I will **seriously** consider your suggestion.

The adverbs in each of the sentences above answer the question *in what manner?* How does Phillip sing? Loudly. How does my cat wait? Impatiently. How will I consider your suggestion? Seriously. Adverbs can answer other types of questions about how an action was performed. They can also tell you *when* (We arrived *early*) and *where* (Turn *here*).

However, there is one type of verb that doesn’t mix well with adverbs. [**Linking verbs**](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/linking-verbs/), such as *feel, smell, sound, seem,* and *appear,*[typically need adjectives, not adverbs](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/adjective#adjective-vs-adverb). A very common example of this type of mixup is

* I feel **badly** about what happened.
* I feel **bad** about what happened.

Because “feel” is a verb, it seems to call for an adverb rather than an adjective. But “feel” isn’t just any verb; it’s a linking verb. An adverb would describe *how* you perform the action of feeling—an adjective describes *what* you feel. “I feel badly” means that you are bad at feeling things. If you’re trying to read Braille through thick leather gloves, then it might make sense for you to say “I feel badly.” But if you’re trying to say that you are experiencing negative emotions, “I feel bad” is the phrase you want.

## Adverbs and adjectives

Adverbs can also modify adjectives and other adverbs. Often, the purpose of the adverb is to add a degree of intensity to the adjective.

* The woman is **quite** pretty.
* This book is **more** interesting than the last one.
* The weather report is **almost always** right.

The adverb *almost* is modifying the adverb *always*, and they’re both modifying *right*.

“Is my singing **too** loud?” asked Phillip.

* My cat is **incredibly** happy to have his dinner.
* We will be **slightly** late to the meeting.

This bridesmaid dress is a **very** unflattering shade of puce.

## Adverbs and other adverbs

You can use an adverb to describe another adverb. In fact, if you wanted to, you could use several.

* Phillip sings **rather enormously too loudly**.

The problem is that it often produces weak and clunky sentences like the one above, so be careful not to overdo it.

### Adverbs and sentences

Some adverbs can modify entire sentences—unsurprisingly, these are called **sentence adverbs**. Common ones include *generally, fortunately, interestingly,* and *accordingly*. Sentence adverbs don’t describe one particular thing in the sentence—instead, they describe a general feeling about all of the information in the sentence.

* Fortunately, we got there in time.
* Interestingly, no one at the auction seemed interested in bidding on the antique spoon collection.

At one time, the use of the word *hopefully* as a sentence adverb (e.g., *Hopefully, I’ll get this job*) was condemned. People continued to use it though, and many style guides and dictionaries now accept it. There are still plenty of readers out there who hate it though, so it’s a good idea to avoid using it in formal writing.

## Degrees of comparison

Like adjectives, adverbs can show degrees of comparison, although it’s slightly less common to use them this way. With certain “flat adverbs” (adverbs that look exactly the same as their adjective counterparts), the comparative and superlative forms look the same as the[adjective comparative and superlative forms](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/adjective/). It’s usually better to use stronger adverbs (or stronger adjectives and verbs) rather than relying on comparative and superlative adverbs.

An absolute adverb describes something in its own right:

* He smiled **warmly**
* A **hastily** written note

To make the comparative form of an adverb that ends in -ly, add the word *more*:

* He smiled **more warmly** than the others.
* The **more hastily** written note contained the clue.
* To make the superlative form of an adverb that ends in -ly, add the word *most*:
* He smiled **most warmly** of them all.
* The **most hastily** written note on the desk was overlooked.

## Placement of adverbs

Place adverbs as close as possible to the words they are supposed to modify. Putting the adverb in the wrong spot can produce an awkward sentence at best and completely change the meaning at worst. Be especially careful about the word *only*, which is one of the most often misplaced [modifiers](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/modifiers/). Consider the difference between these two sentences:

* Phillip only fed the cat.
* Phillip fed only the cat.

The first sentence means that all Phillip did was feed the cat. He didn’t pet the cat or pick it up or anything else. The second sentence means that Phillip fed the cat, but he didn’t feed the dog, the bird, or anyone else who might have been around.

When an adverb is modifying a verb phrase, the most natural place for the adverb is usually the middle of the phrase.

* We are **quickly** approaching the deadline.
* Phillip has **always** loved singing.
* I will **happily** assist you.

## When to avoid adverbs

Ernest Hemingway is often held up as an example of a great writer who detested adverbs and advised other writers to avoid them. In reality, it’s impossible to avoid adverbs altogether. Sometimes we need them, and all writers (even Hemingway) use them occasionally. The trick is to avoid *unnecessary* adverbs. When your verb or adjective doesn’t seem powerful or precise enough, instead of reaching for an adverb to add more color, try reaching for a stronger verb or adjective instead. Most of the time, you’ll come up with a better word and your writing will be stronger for it.