

Adjectives: Highlighting Details

Adjectives are words that describe, identify, or quantify nouns and pronouns. They highlight details and sharpen the image or idea they modify.

- Descriptive adjectives describe a noun.
Example: Jenny drives a **black** Porsche.
- Identifying adjectives indicate which thing is being referred to.
Example: We have never been to **that** store.
- Quantitative adjectives quantify a noun.
Example: I have **three** brothers and **two** sisters.

Proper Adjectives

Proper adjectives are formed from proper nouns and must be capitalized.

Examples of Proper Adjectives

My friend Jasmine is **Lebanese**.

I am fascinated by **Shakespearean** literature.

Descriptive Adjectives

Descriptive adjectives have three forms that express different degrees.

- The *positive* form of an adjective is the simplest base form.
- The *comparative* form compares two or more objects.
- The *superlative* form compares three or more objects.

Examples of Descriptive Adjectives

Positive: That is a **small** cat.

Comparative: That cat is **smaller** than my cat.

Superlative: That is the **smallest** cat I have ever seen.

Subclasses of Adjectives

There are two subclasses of adjectives: *attributive* and *predicative*.

Attributive Adjectives

Attributive adjectives usually come before a noun and characterize the noun.

Examples of Attributive Adjectives

The *skinny* man is running.

I drive a *red* car.

Predicative Adjectives

Predicative adjectives occur in the predicate of a sentence (after the subject and main verb).

Examples of Predicative Adjectives

That man is *skinny*.

My car is *red*.

Adjectives are also in the predicative position when they follow the noun:

The forest, *primeval* and *frightening*, is an icon in many children's stories.

In this sentence the adjectives have been moved out of their normal pre-noun position so that they get more emphasis since these features of the forest are what make it such an effective icon in children's stories.

Adjective Tests

To test whether or not a word is an adjective, place the basic form of that word in both slots of the frame sentence below. If the sentence is grammatically correct, the word is an adjective.

Adjective Frame Sentence

The _____ man is very _____.

Sample Sentences Using the Adjective Frame

The *funny* man is very *funny*.

Since this test yields a grammatically correct sentence, *funny* is an adjective.

The *eating* man is very *eating*.

Since this test yields a sentence that is not grammatically correct, *eating* is not an adjective. You probably recognize it as a *participle*—an -ing form of the verb *to eat*.

Participles as Adjectives

A *participle* is not an *adjective*. But notice that *eating* can be used as an adjective, in the predicative position, in this sentence:

A man *eating* is a man contented.

Another participle *singing* can be used as an adjective as well. Notice that this one works in the attributive position:

The *singing* telegram was very entertaining.

Participles are often used as single-word modifiers of nouns, before or after the noun. When they modify a noun, these words are functioning as adjectives, that is, *adjectivally*.

Activity 1

Directions: Underline the adjectives in the following sentences. Identify whether they are attributive (A) or predicative (P). Also identify if they are descriptive (D), or identifying (I), or quantitative (Q) adjectives.

1. The purple umbrella was resting on those boots.
2. In the summer, the weather is warm here in sunny California.
3. In the Victorian era, women wore dresses that were long.
4. That girl's dress is pretty.
5. I have two Bolivian friends who are both extremely intelligent.

Answer Key for Activity 1

1. purple (A, D), those (A, I)
2. warm (P, D), sunny (A, D)
3. Victorian (A, D), long (P, D)
4. That (A, I), pretty (P, D)
5. two (A, Q), Bolivian (A, D), intelligent (P, D)

Activity 2

Directions: Fill in the blanks with the adjective in the appropriate degree.

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
Mean	Meaner	1.
2.	3.	Narrowest
4.	Happier	5.
Close	6.	7.
8.	9.	Greatest

Answer Key for Activity 2

1. Meanest
2. Narrow
3. Narrower
4. Happy
5. Happiest
6. Closer
7. Closest
8. Great
9. Greater

Activity 3

In a paragraph of at least five sentences describe in detail the favorite function of your smart phone or laptop, so that your readers, students at SJSU, will be intrigued enough by its functionality to consider purchasing one for themselves. As you compose, think consciously about the adjectives you might use to include a rich array of details and effects: proper adjectives and descriptive adjectives, comparative and superlative adjectives, attributive adjectives and predicative adjectives. Play with both the forms and placement of the adjectives you use to make the sale!

Circle the adjectives in your paragraph and draw an arrow to the noun or pronoun they modify.

References

Klammer, Thomas, Muriel Schulz, and Angela Della Volpe. *Analyzing English Grammar*. 5th ed. New York: Pearson Education. 2007. Print.

Lundsford, Andrea. *The Everyday Writer*. 4th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins. 2010. Print.