

Adverbs -- Common List in American English

This is a selected set of adverbs for the beginning student to have a starter set to help further describe actions. An ADVERB modifies a verb. It helps to tell "how," "when" or "where" the action took place. I have used it by picking a verb such as ran in a sentence such as "She ran," "She lost" or "He spoke." Students then must pick an adverb to add to the sentence such as "She ran yesterday" or "She ran quickly to the store" or "She runs annually in the big race." This gives the student a chance to use them in a sentence. An adverb can also modify another adverb. Such as "She ran very quickly to the store."

accidentally	crossly	gladly	nearly	reluctantly	sternly
afterwards	cruelly	gracefully	neatly	repeatedly	successfully
almost	daily	greedily	nervously	rightfully	suddenly
always	defiantly	happily	never	roughly	suspiciously
angrily	deliberately	hastily	noisily	rudely	swiftly
annually	doubtfully	honestly	not	sadly	tenderly
anxiously	easily	hourly	obediently	safely	tensely
awkwardly	elegantly	hungrily	obnoxiously	seldom	thoughtfully
badly	enormously	innocently	often	selfishly	tightly
blindly	enthusiastically	inquisitively	only	seriously	tomorrow
boastfully	equally	irritably	painfully	shakily	too
boldly	even	joyously	perfectly	sharply	truthfully
bravely	eventually	justly	politely	shrilly	unexpectedly
briefly	exactly	kindly	poorly	shyly	very
brightly	faithfully	lazily	powerfully	silently	victoriously

busily	far	less	promptly	sleepily	violently
calmly	fast	loosely	punctually	slowly	vivaciously
carefully	fatally	loudly	quickly	smoothly	warmly
carelessly	fiercely	madly	quietly	softly	weakly
cautiously	fondly	merrily	rapidly	solemnly	wearily
cheerfully	foolishly	monthly	rarely	sometimes	well
clearly	fortunately	more	really	soon	wildly
correctly	frantically	mortally	recklessly	speedily	yearly
courageously	gently	mysteriously	regularly	stealthily	yesterday

ADVERBS

Definition

Adverbs are words that modify

- a **verb** (He drove slowly. — How did he drive?)
- an **adjective** (He drove a very fast car. — How fast was his car?)
- another adverb (She moved quite slowly down the aisle. — How slowly did she move?)

As we will see, adverbs often tell when, where, why, or under what conditions something happens or happened. Adverbs frequently end in *-ly*; however, many words and phrases not ending in *-ly* serve an adverbial function and an *-ly* ending is not a guarantee that a word is an adverb. The words *lovely*, *lonely*, *motherly*, *friendly*, *neighborly*, for instance, are adjectives:

- That lovely woman lives in a friendly neighborhood.

If a group of words containing a subject and verb acts as an adverb (modifying the verb of a sentence), it is called an **Adverb Clause**:

- When this class is over, we're going to the movies.

When a group of words not containing a subject and verb acts as an adverb, it is called an **adverbial phrase**. **Prepositional phrases** frequently have adverbial functions (telling place and time, modifying the verb):

- He went to the movies.
- She works on holidays.
- They lived in Canada during the war.

And **Infinitive phrases** can act as adverbs (usually telling why):

- She hurried to the mainland to see her brother.
- The senator ran to catch the bus.

But there are other kinds of adverbial phrases:

- He calls his mother as often as possible.

Adverbs can modify **adjectives**, but an adjective cannot modify an adverb. Thus we would say that "the students showed a really wonderful attitude" and that "the students showed a wonderfully casual attitude" and that "my professor is really tall, but not "He ran real fast."

Like adjectives, adverbs can have comparative and superlative forms to show degree.

- Walk faster if you want to keep up with me.
- The student who reads fastest will finish first.

We often use *more* and *most*, *less* and *least* to show degree with adverbs:

- With sneakers on, she could move more quickly among the patients.
- The flowers were the most beautifully arranged creations I've ever seen.
- She worked less confidently after her accident.
- That was the least skillfully done performance I've seen in years.

The as — as construction can be used to create adverbs that express sameness or equality: "He can't run as fast as his sister."

A handful of adverbs have two forms, one that ends in *-ly* and one that doesn't. In certain cases, the two forms have different meanings:

- He arrived late.
- Lately, he couldn't seem to be on time for anything.

In most cases, however, the form without the *-ly* ending should be reserved for casual situations:

- She certainly drives slow in that old Buick of hers.
- He did wrong by her.
- He spoke sharp, quick, and to the point.

Adverbs often function as **intensifiers**, conveying a greater or lesser emphasis to something. Intensifiers are said to have three different functions: they can emphasize, amplify, or downtone. Here are some examples:

•Emphasizers:

- I really don't believe him.
- He literally wrecked his mother's car.
- She simply ignored me.
- They're going to be late, for sure.

•Amplifiers:

- The teacher completely rejected her proposal.
- I absolutely refuse to attend any more faculty meetings.
- They heartily endorsed the new restaurant.
- I so wanted to go with them.
- We know this city well.

•Downtoners:

- I kind of like this college.
- Joe sort of felt betrayed by his sister.
- His mother mildly disapproved his actions.
- We can improve on this to some extent.
- The boss almost quit after that.
- The school was all but ruined by the storm.

Adverbs (as well as adjectives) in their various degrees can be accompanied by premodifiers:

- She runs very fast.

- We're going to run out of material all the faster

This issue is addressed in the section on [degrees in adjectives](#).

For this section on intensifiers, we are indebted to *A Grammar of Contemporary English* by Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, and Jan Svartvik. Longman Group: London. 1978. pages 438 to 457. Examples our own.

Using Adverbs in a Numbered List

Within the normal flow of text, it's nearly always a bad idea to number items beyond three or four, at the most. Anything beyond that, you're better off with a [vertical list](#) that uses numbers (1, 2, 3, etc.). Also, in such a list, don't use adverbs (with an *-ly* ending); use instead the uninflected ordinal number (first, second, third, fourth, fifth, etc.). First (not firstly), it's unclear what the adverb is modifying. Second (not secondly), it's unnecessary. Third (not thirdly), after you get beyond "secondly," it starts to sound silly. Adverbs that number in this manner are treated as *disjuncts* (see [below](#).)

Adverbs We Can Do Without--Intensifiers that Don't Intensify

Avoid using words such as *really*, *very*, *quite*, *extremely*, *severely* when they are not necessary. It is probably enough to say that the salary increase is *inadequate*. Does saying that it is *severely* inadequate introduce anything more than a tone of hysteria? These words shouldn't be banished from your vocabulary, but they will be used to best effect when used sparingly.

Kinds of Adverbs

Adverbs of Manner

She moved slowly and spoke quietly.

Adverbs of Place

She has lived on the island all her life.

She still lives there now.

Adverbs of Frequency

She takes the boat to the mainland every day.

She often goes by herself.

Adverbs of Time

She tries to get back before dark.

It's starting to get dark now.

She finished her tea first.

She left early.

Adverbs of Purpose

She drives her boat slowly to avoid hitting the rocks.

She shops in several stores to get the best buys.

Positions of Adverbs

One of the hallmarks of adverbs is their ability to move around in a sentence.

Adverbs of manner are particularly flexible in this regard.

- Solemnly the minister addressed her congregation.
- The minister solemnly addressed her congregation.
- The minister addressed her congregation solemnly.

The following adverbs of frequency appear in various points in these sentences:

- Before the main verb: I never get up before nine o'clock.
- Between the auxiliary verb and the main verb: I have rarely written to my brother without a good reason.
- Before the verb *used to*: I always *used to* see him at his summer home.



Indefinite adverbs of time can appear either before the verb or between the auxiliary and the main verb:

- He finally showed up for batting practice.
- She has recently retired.



Order of Adverbs

There is a basic order in which adverbs will appear when there is more than one.

 THE ROYAL ORDER OF ADVERBS 					
Verb	Manner	Place	Frequency	Time	Purpose
Beth swims	enthusiastically	in the pool	every morning	before dawn	to keep in shape.
Dad walks	impatiently	into town	every afternoon	before supper	to get a newspaper.
Sonia naps		in her room	every morning	before lunch.	
<p>In actual practice, of course, it would be highly unusual to have a string of adverbial modifiers beyond two or three (at the most). Because the placement of adverbs is so flexible, one or two of the modifiers would probably move to the beginning of the sentence: "Every afternoon before supper, Dad impatiently walks into town to get a newspaper." When that happens, the introductory adverbial modifiers are usually set off with a comma.</p>					

More Notes on Adverb Order

As a general principle, shorter adverbial phrases precede longer adverbial phrases, regardless of content. In the following sentence, an adverb of time precedes an adverb of frequency because it is shorter (and simpler):

- Dad takes a brisk walk before breakfast every day of his life.

A second principle: among similar adverbial phrases of kind (manner, place, frequency, etc.), the more specific adverbial phrase comes first:

- My grandmother was born in a sod house on the plains of northern Nebraska.
- She promised to meet him for lunch next Tuesday.

Bringing an adverbial modifier to the beginning of the sentence can place special emphasis on that modifier. This is particularly useful with adverbs of manner:

- Slowly, ever so carefully, Jesse filled the coffee cup up to the brim, even above the brim.
- Occasionally, but only occasionally, one of these lemons will get by the inspectors.

Inappropriate Adverb Order

Modifiers can sometimes attach themselves to and thus modify words that they ought not to modify.

- They reported that Giuseppe Balle, a European rock star, had died on the six o'clock news.

Clearly, it would be better to move the underlined modifier to a position immediately after "they reported" or even to the beginning of the sentence — so the poor man doesn't die on television.

Misplacement can also occur with very simple modifiers, such as *only* and *barely*:

- She only grew to be four feet tall.

It would be better if "She grew to be only four feet tall."

Adjuncts, Disjuncts, and Conjuncts

Regardless of its position, an adverb is often neatly integrated into the flow of a sentence. When this is true, as it almost always is, the adverb is called an adjunct. (Notice the underlined adjuncts or adjunctive adverbs in the first two sentences of this paragraph.) When the adverb does not fit into the flow of the clause, it is called a disjunct or a conjunct and is often set off by a comma or set of commas. A disjunct frequently acts as a kind of evaluation of the rest of the sentence. Although it usually modifies the verb, we could say that it modifies the entire clause, too. Notice how "too" is a disjunct in the sentence immediately before this one; that same word can also serve as an adjunct adverbial modifier: It's too hot to play outside. Here are two more disjunctive adverbs:

- Frankly, Martha, I don't give a hoot.
- Fortunately, no one was hurt.

Conjuncts, on the other hand, serve a connector function within the flow of the text, signaling a transition between ideas.

- If they start smoking those awful cigars, then I'm not staying.
- We've told the landlord about this ceiling again and again, and yet he's done nothing to fix it.

At the extreme edge of this category, we have the purely conjunctive device known as the conjunctive adverb (often called the adverbial conjunction):

- Jose has spent years preparing for this event; nevertheless, he's the most nervous person here.
- I love this school; however, I don't think I can afford the tuition.

Some Special Cases

The adverbs *enough* and *not enough* usually take a postmodifier position:

- Is that music loud enough?
- These shoes are not big enough.
- In a roomful of elderly people, you must remember to speak loudly enough.

(Notice, though, that when *enough* functions as an adjective, it can come before the noun:

- Did she give us enough time?

The adverb *enough* is often followed by an infinitive:

- She didn't run fast enough to win.

The adverb *too* comes before adjectives and other adverbs:

- She ran too fast.
- She works too quickly.

If *too* comes after the adverb it is probably a disjunct (meaning *also*) and is usually set off with a comma:

- Yasmin works hard. She works quickly, too.

The adverb *too* is often followed by an infinitive:

- She runs too slowly to enter this race.

Another common construction with the adverb *too* is *too* followed by a prepositional phrase — *for + the object of the preposition* — followed by an infinitive:

- This milk is too hot for a baby to drink.

Relative Adverbs

Adjectival clauses are sometimes introduced by what are called the **relative adverbs**: *where*, *when*, and *why*. Although the entire clause is adjectival and will modify a noun, the relative word itself fulfills an adverbial function (modifying a verb within its own clause).

The relative adverb *where* will begin a clause that modifies a noun of place:

My entire family now worships in the church where my great grandfather used to be minister.

The relative pronoun "where" modifies the verb "used to be" (which makes it adverbial), but the entire clause ("where my great grandfather used to be minister") modifies the word "church."

A *when* clause will modify nouns of time:

My favorite month is always February, when we celebrate Valentine's Day and Presidents' Day.

And a *why* clause will modify the noun *reason*:

Do you know the reason why Isabel isn't in class today?

We sometimes leave out the relative adverb in such clauses, and many writers prefer "that" to "why" in a clause referring to "reason":

- Do you know the reason ~~why~~ Isabel isn't in class today?
- I always look forward to the day ~~when~~ we begin our summer vacation.

- I know the reason that men like motorcycles.

Authority for this section: *Understanding English Grammar* by Martha Kolln. 4th Edition. MacMillan Publishing Company: New York. 1994.

Viewpoint, Focus, and Negative Adverbs

A **viewpoint adverb** generally comes after a noun and is related to an adjective that precedes that noun:

- A successful athletic team is often a **good team** scholastically.
- Investing all our money in snowmobiles was probably not a **sound idea** financially.

You will sometimes hear a phrase like "scholastically speaking" or "financially speaking" in these circumstances, but the word "speaking" is seldom necessary.

A **focus adverb** indicates that what is being communicated is limited to the part that is focused; a focus adverb will tend either to limit the sense of the sentence ("He got an A just for attending the class.") or to act as an additive ("He got an A in addition to being published.")

Although negative constructions like the words "not" and "never" are usually found embedded within a verb string — "He has never been much help to his mother." — they are technically not part of the verb; they are, indeed, adverbs. However, a so-called **negative adverb** creates a negative meaning in a sentence *without* the use of the usual no/not/neither/nor/never constructions:

- He seldom visits.
- She hardly eats anything since the accident.
- After her long and tedious lectures, rarely was anyone awake.