Recognize an adverb when you see one.

Adverbs tweak the meaning of verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, and clauses. Read, for example, this sentence:

Our basset hound Bailey sleeps on the living room floor.

Is Bailey a sound sleeper, curled into a tight ball? Or is he a fitful sleeper, his paws twitching while he dreams? The addition of an adverb adjusts the meaning of the verb *sleeps* so that the reader has a clearer picture:

Our basset hound Bailey sleeps *peacefully* on the living room floor.

Adverbs can be single words, or they can be phrases or clauses. Adverbs answer one of these four questions: *How?* *When?* *Where?* and *Why?*

Here are some single-word examples:

Lenora *rudely* grabbed the last chocolate cookie.

The adverb *rudely* fine-tunes the verb *grabbed.*

Tyler stumbled in the *completely* dark kitchen.

The adverb *completely* fine-tunes the adjective *dark.*

Roxanne *very* happily accepted the ten-point late penalty to work on her research essay one more day.

The adverb *very* fine-tunes the adverb *happily.*

*Surprisingly,* the restroom stalls had toilet paper.

The adverb *surprisingly* modifies the entire main clause that follows.

Many single-word adverbs end in *ly.* In the examples above, you saw *peacefully, rudely, completely, happily,* and *surprisingly.*
Not all *ly* words are adverbs, however. *Lively, lonely,* and *lovely* are *adjectives* instead, answering the questions *What kind?* or *Which one?*

Many single-word adverbs have no specific ending, such as *next, not, often, seldom,* and *then.* If you are uncertain whether a word is an adverb or not, use a *dictionary* to determine its part of speech.

Adverbs can also be *multi-word phrases* and *clauses.* Here are some examples:

*At 2 a.m., a bat flew through Deidre’s open bedroom window.*

The *prepositional phrase* *at 2 a.m.* indicates *when* the event happened. The second *prepositional phrase,* *through Deidre’s open bedroom window,* describes *where* the creature traveled.

With a fork, George thrashed the raw eggs *until they foamed.*

The *subordinate clause* *until they foamed* describes *how* George prepared the eggs.

Sylvia emptied the carton of milk into the sink *because the expiration date had long passed.*

The subordinate clause *because the expiration date had long passed* describes *why* Sylvia poured out the milk.

**Avoid an adverb when a single, stronger word will do.**

Many readers believe that adverbs make sentences bloated and flabby. When you can replace a two-word combination with a more powerful, single word, do so!

For example, don’t write *drink quickly* when you mean *gulp,* or *walk slowly* when you mean *saunter,* or *very hungry* when you mean *ravenous.*

**Form comparative and superlative adverbs correctly.**

To make comparisons, you will often need comparative or superlative adverbs. You use comparative adverbs—*more* and *less*—if you are discussing *two people, places,* or *things.*
You use superlative adverbs—most and least—if you have three or more people, places, or things.

Look at these two examples:

- Beth loves green vegetables, so she eats broccoli more frequently than her brother Daniel.

- Among the members of her family, Beth eats pepperoni pizza the least often.

**Don't use an adjective when you need an adverb instead.**

You will often hear people say, "Anthony is real smart" or "This pizza sauce is real salty."

Real is an adjective, so it cannot modify another adjective like smart or salty. What people should say is "Anthony is really smart" or "This pizza sauce is really salty."

If you train yourself to add the extra ly syllable when you speak, you will likely remember it when you write, where its absence will otherwise cost you points or respect!

**Realize that an adverb is not part of the verb.**

Some verbs require up to four words to complete the tense. A multi-part verb has a base or main part as well as auxiliary or helping verbs with it.

When a short adverb such as also, never, or not interrupts, it is still an adverb, not part of the verb. Read these examples:

- For his birthday, Frank would also like a jar of dill pickles.

  \textit{Would like} = verb; \textit{also} = adverb.

- After that dreadful casserole you made last night, Julie will never eat tuna or broccoli again.

  \textit{Will eat} = verb; \textit{never} = adverb.
Despite the approaching deadline, Sheryl-Ann has **not** started her research essay.

*Has started* = verb; *not* = adverb.