

THE ADVERB

Recognize an adverb when you find 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 readers have 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 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**.

To work on her research essay one more day, Roxanne **quite** happily accepted the ten-point late penalty.

The adverb **quite** 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, quite, seldom, and then*. If you are uncertain whether a word is an adverb or not, **consult a dictionary** to determine its part of speech.

Adverbs can also be multi-word **phrases** and **clauses**.

Here are 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 single, more powerful word, do so!

For example, avoid *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.

Consider 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**.

Do not use an adjective when you need an adverb instead.

People will often 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 might cost you points from a grade or respect from your colleagues!

Realize that an adverb is not part of the verb.

Some **verbs** require up to four words to complete the tense. The resulting **verb phrase** 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.

Would like = verb; **also** = adverb.

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

Will eat = verb; **never** = adverb.

Despite the approaching deadline, Sheryl-Ann has **not** started her research essay.

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

