

Adverbs

Definitions

An **adjective** is a word or set of words that **modifies** (i.e., describes) a noun or pronoun. Adjectives may come before the word they modify.

An **adverb** is a word or set of words that modifies verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs.

Examples:

He speaks **slowly** (modifies the verb *speaks*)

He is **especially** clever (modifies the adjective *clever*)

He speaks **all too** slowly (modifies the adverb *slowly*)

An adverb answers how, when, where, or to what extent—how often or how much (e.g., *daily*, *completely*).

Examples:

He speaks **slowly** (answers the question *how*)

He speaks **very** slowly (answers the question *how slowly*)

Rule 1. Many adverbs end in *-ly*, but many do not. Generally, if a word can have *-ly* added to its adjective form, place it there to form an adverb.

Examples:

She thinks **quick/quickly**.

How does she think? *Quickly*.

She is a **quick/quickly** thinker.

Quick is an adjective describing *thinker*, so no *-ly* is attached.

She thinks **fast/fastly**.

Fast answers the question *how*, so it is an adverb. But *fast* never has *-ly* attached to it.

We performed **bad/badly**.

Badly describes *how* we performed, so *-ly* is added.

Rule 2. Adverbs that answer the question *how* sometimes cause grammatical problems. It can be a challenge to determine if *-ly* should be attached. Avoid the trap of *-ly* with linking verbs, such as *taste*, *smell*, *look*, *feel*, etc., that pertain to the senses. Adverbs are often misplaced in such sentences, which require adjectives instead.

Examples:

Roses smell **sweet**/sweetly.

Do the roses actively smell with noses? No; in this case, *smell* is a linking verb—which requires an adjective to modify *roses*—so no *-ly*.

The woman looked **angry**/angrily to us.

Did the woman look with her eyes, or are we describing her appearance? We are describing her appearance (she appeared angry), so no *-ly*.

The woman looked angry/**angrily** at the paint splotches.

Here the woman actively looked (used her eyes), so the *-ly* is added.

She feels **bad**/badly about the news.

She is not feeling with fingers, so no *-ly*.

Rule 3. The word *good* is an adjective, whose adverb equivalent is *well*.

Examples:

You did a good job.

Good describes the job.

You did the job well.

Well answers *how*.

You smell good today.

Good describes your fragrance, not how you smell with your nose, so using the adjective is correct.

You smell well for someone with a cold.

You are actively smelling with your nose here, so use the adverb.

Rule 4. The word *well* can be an adjective, too. When referring to health, we often use *well* rather than *good*.

Examples:

You do not look well today.

I don't feel well, either.

Rule 5. There are three degrees of adverbs. In formal usage, do not drop the *-ly* from an adverb when using the comparative form.

Incorrect: *She spoke quicker than he did.*

Correct: *She spoke **more quickly** than he did.*

Incorrect: *Talk quieter.*

Correct: *Talk **more quietly**.*