

MODIFIERS: ADJECTIVES



Don't tell me the moon is shining; show
me the glint of light on broken glass.
– Anton Chekhov

8a

Forms

Adjectives have three forms: base (or positive), comparative, and superlative. The base form is used when describing one thing without comparing it to anything else.

- ➔ Breaking a mirror can be **bad** luck, but if so, I will probably have bad luck for a hundred years.

The comparative form of an adjective compares one thing to another and uses the suffix *-er* or the words *more* or *less* to make the comparison. Usually, you will use *more* or *less* for adjectives with three or more syllables. Consult a dictionary if you are not sure.

- ➔ My walk to school was **longer** today because I had to avoid three black cats.
- ➔ It took **more concentration** to get to school today because I had to avoid three black cats.

The superlative form of an adjective compares three or more things and uses the suffix *-est* or the words *most* or *least* to make the comparison. Usually, you will use *most* or *least* for adjectives with three or more syllables. Consult a dictionary if you are not sure.

- ➔ Out of my three outings this week, the one to school took the **longest** time.
- ➔ My trip to school this week was the **most annoying** trip ever.

Some adjectives have irregular comparative and superlative forms.

- ➔ I had the **worst** time getting to school today because of three black cats.
- ➔ I would feel **better** if I were not so superstitious.

Irregular adjectives

Base	Comparative	Superlative
good	better	best
bad	worse	worst
little	less	least
many	more	most
much	more	most
some	more	most

8b

Types

Adjectives usually occur before the noun they modify; however, they can also occur in subject complement position when they follow a linking verb (see 6a1).

Before the noun ➔ When I was cooking spaghetti, I spilled salt, so I was sure to throw it over **my left** shoulder.

Subject complement ➔ The salt was **messy**, but I did not care at that point.

If two or more words function as an adjective before a noun, use hyphens to join the words together.

→ One of my **well-known** recipes calls for a lot of salt.

If the two or more words come after the verb, do not hyphenate.

→ One of my salty recipes is **well known**.

Adjectives can be part of larger adjective phrases. When an adjective has a pre-modifier or a post-modifier, these modifiers are part of the adjective phrase. This is important to know because you would never want to separate an adjective from its modifier with a comma or another type of punctuation. Adverbs (such as *very*, *so*, *quite*, *rather*, *hardly*, *frequently*) can pre-modify adjectives, and infinitive verbs (such as *to go*, *to sell*, *to feel*) and relative clauses (such as *who will go* or *that shares my values*) can post-modify adjectives.

Adjective as single word → The salt was **messy**.

Adjective phrase with pre-modifier → The salt was **very messy**.

Adjective phrase with post-modifier → The salt was **gritty to the touch**.

Adjective phrase with pre-modifier and post-modifier → The salt was **so messy that I had to stop cooking and clean it up**.

EXERCISE 1

Directions: Underline each adjective or adjective phrase in the following sentences.

1. Recently, a news survey showed that a large percentage of Americans say that they have experienced credible results based on a superstition.
2. A four-leaf clover is often considered good luck.
3. Bringing an open umbrella inside is often considered bad luck.
4. Good luck and bad luck are both considered to be superstitious.
5. Believing in good luck can be a self-fulfilling prophecy that then confirms the belief in good luck.

8c

Functions

Adjectives describe, quantify, or identify a pronoun, noun, or noun phrase.

Describes → If you are superstitious, a **black** cat crossing in front of you is a sign of **bad** luck.

Quantifies → Do you have more bad luck if **several** black cats cross your path?

Identifies → I have watched **that** cat cross my path three times now.



Pronouns, articles, and numbers can also be used as adjectives to help quantify or identify.

Quantifies → I walked under **four** ladders on my way to work.

Identifies → It was **the** cat walking under **the** ladder with me on Friday **the** 13th that really scared me.

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