Adverb

What is an Adverb?

An adverb is a word that is used to change, modify or qualify several types of words including an adjective, a verb, a clause, another adverb, or any other type of word or phrase, with the exception of determiners and adjectives, that directly modify nouns. A good way to understand adverbs is to think about them as the words that provide context. Specifically, adverbs provide a description of how, where, when, in what manner and to what extent something is done or happens. Normally, we can spot an adverb by the fact that it often ends in –ly, but there are lots of adverbs that don’t end in this way. Moreover, adverbs can be used in many combinations with each other.

Traditionally considered a single part of speech, adverbs perform a wide variety of functions, making it difficult to treat them as a single, unified category. However, spotting an adverb, especially one that ends in -ly is easy. Adverbs normally help paint a fuller picture by describing how something happens, such as

When? She always arrives early.

How? He drives carefully.

Where? They go everywhere together.

In what way? She eats slowly.

To what extent? It is terribly hot.

This function of providing more information about how something is done is called the adverbial function, and it may be accomplished by using adverbial clauses and adverbial phrases as well as by adverbs that stand alone.

There are many rules for using adverbs, and these rules often depend upon which type of adverb you are using. Remember these basics and using adverbs to make sentences more meaningful will be easier for you.

Adverbs can always be used to modify verbs. Notice that the second of these two sentences is much more interesting simply because it contains an adverb:

The dog ran. (You can picture a dog running, but you don’t really know much more about the scene.)

The dog ran excitedly. (You can picture a dog running, wagging its tail, panting happily, and looking glad to see its owner. You can paint a much more interesting picture in your head when you know how or why the dog is running.)

Adverbs are often formed by adding the letters “-ly” to adjectives. This makes it very easy to identify adverbs in sentences. There are many exceptions to this rule; everywhere, nowhere, and upstairs are a few examples.

An adverb can be used to modify an adjective and intensify the meaning it conveys. For example:

He plays tennis well. (He knows how to play tennis and sometimes he wins.)

He plays tennis extremely well. (He knows how to play tennis so well that he wins often.)

As you read the following adverb examples, you’ll notice how these useful words modify other words and phrases by providing information about the place, time, manner, certainty, frequency, or other circumstances of activity denoted by the verbs or verb phrases in the sentences.

Types of Adverbs

Adverbs of Manner

An adverb of manner will explain how an action is carried out. Very often adverbs of manner are adjectives with -ly added to the end, but this is certainly not always the case. In fact, some adverbs of manner will have the same spelling as the adjective form.

Some examples of adverbs of manner include:

Slowly

Rapidly

Clumsily

Badly

Diligently

Sweetly

Warmly

Sadly

Adverb of manner examples in the following sentences are in bold for easy identification.

She passed the exam easily.

They walk quickly to catch the train.

The dinner party went badly.

John answered the question correctly.

Notice how the adjectives are formed by adding -ly to the adjectives bad, correct and quick, although there is a slight spelling change when forming an adverb with the adjective easy.

As mentioned, some adverbs of manner take the same spelling as the adjective and never add an -ly to the end:

The boys had worked hard.

The car drives

Julia dances well.

Adverbs of place

An adverb of place, sometimes called spatial adverbs, will help explain where an action happens. Adverbs of place will be associated with the action of the verb in a sentence, providing context for direction, distance and position: southeast, everywhere, up, left, close by, back, inside, around. These terms don’t usually end in -ly.

Adverbs of place examples in the following sentences are in bold for easy identification.

Directions

New York is located north of Philadelphia.

They traveled down the mountainside.

First, I looked here, and then I looked there, but I can’t find them anywhere.

Notice that here and there are often used at the beginning of a sentence to express emphasis or in exclamation.

Here comes the sun.

There is love in the air.

Here you are!

Many times, adverbs of place can be used as prepositions as well. The difference is, when the phrase is used as an adverb, it is modifying a verb; when it is used as a preposition, it is always followed by a noun.

New York is located north of Philadelphia -> New York is on the map.

They travelled down river -> They travelled in the first compartment.

That puppy was walking around by itself-> We put a collar around its neck.

Distance

There was a deli

Jane is moving far away.

Carly is sitting close to me.

Position

The treasure lies underneath the box.

The cat is sleeping on the bed.

Why are you standing in the middle of the dancefloor?

In addition, some adverbs of position will refer to a direction of movement. These often end in -ward or -wards.

Oscar travelled onward to Los Angeles.

Hannah looked upwards to the heavens.

Molly, move forward to the front of the queue, please.

Adverbs of Frequency

Adverbs of frequency are used to express time or how often something occurs. Adverbs of frequency can be split two main groups. The first, adverbs of indefinite frequency, are terms that have an unclear meaning as to how long are how often something occurs: usually, always, normally. These adverbs will usually be placed after the main verb or between the auxiliary verb and infinitive.

Adverbs of frequency examples in the following sentences are in bold for easy identification.

The adverb is usually placed before the main verb.

I can normally make the shot.

I will always love

Adverbs of definite frequency will usually be placed at the end of the sentence.

We get paid hourly.

I come here

The situation seems to change monthly.

The newspaper is bought daily.

Adverbs of Time

Adverbs of time, while seemingly similar to adverbs of frequency, tell us when something happens. Adverbs of time are usually placed at the end of a sentence.

Adverbs of time examples in the following sentences are in bold for easy identification.

I will see you

Harvey forgot his lunch yesterday and again today.

I have to go now.

We first met Julie last year.

While it’s almost always correct to have the adverb of time at the end of the sentence, you can place it at the start of the sentence to put a different emphasis on the time if it is important to the context.

Last year was the worst year of my life.

Tomorrow our fate will be sealed.

Yesterday my troubles seemed so far away.