

Adjective Issues for ESL Writers

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Adjectives

Adjectives describe nouns or noun phrases. They are almost always placed in this order:

- 1) *Number*
- 2) *Evaluation*
- 3) *Physical Description (size, shape, age, color)*
- 4) *Classifying Adjectives*

Adjective Rules

Rule One: The adjectives are placed before the noun if sentence does not use a 'to be' verb to define the noun.

The sixteen durable oblong rods undergird
Number *Evaluation* *Shape* *Subject*
the bridge section.

The two experienced and certified
Number *Evaluation* *Class*
engineers accompany the undergrads.
Subject

Adjective Rules

Rule Two: The adjectives are placed after the noun if a ‘to be’ verb is used to define the noun.

The road **was** long, flat, and two-lane.
Shape *Shape* *Class*

The mixture **is** toxic and hazardous.
Evaluation *Class*

“To be” verbs are conjugations of “to be”: *am, is, are, was, were*

Comma Rules for Adjectives

Commas always separate *coordinate adjectives*. Coordinate adjectives have the same status in the sentence, as in the following examples:

He was a difficult, stubborn child.

The quick, efficient roadwork helped the city a lot.

The crew used meticulous, precise measurements to complete the work.

Comma Rules for Adjectives

How will you know if the adjectives are coordinate?

Ask these two questions:

Does the sentence make sense if the adjectives are written in a different order?

Does the sentence make sense if *and* goes between the adjectives?

If the answer to these questions is yes, the adjectives are coordinate and should be separated by a comma. *Never put a comma between the last adjective and the noun.*

Practice Examples

Order the words in parenthesis to create a sentence with appropriate adjective order. Ask the 'coordinate adjective' questions to determine if you need a comma between adjectives.

- 1) The saw cuts were (*clean deep straight*).
- 2) The team of (*Lebanese chemical well-renowned*) engineers visited campus.

Practice Answers

1) The saw cuts were clean, deep, and
Evaluation Shape
straight.
Shape

2) The team of well-renowned, Lebanese
Evaluation Class
chemical engineers visited campus.
Class

Practice Examples

Order the words in parenthesis to create a sentence with appropriate adjective order. Ask the 'coordinate adjective' questions to determine if you need a comma between adjectives.

3) The (*pavement control group unhardened*) mixture was used for the final experiment.

4) The (*graduate industrious intelligent*) student worked hard in the class.

Practice Answers

3) The unhardened pavement control group
physical descript. *Class* *Class*
mixture was used for the final
experiment.

4) The industrious, intelligent graduate
Evaluation *Evaluation* *Class*
student worked hard in the class.

Adapted by Joshua Prenosil and Linda Bergmann from *The Thomson Handbook* by David Blakesley and Jeffrey L. Hoogeveen



For More Information

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