Adjectives

Consider the following passages:

Example 1
The man walked down the street. Along the way, he saw a dog. Then he saw a car going fast. It just missed a young boy who was crossing the street. He stepped in some water. He turned around and went home.

Example 2
The frail, elderly tramp hobbled down the sidewalk, white hair waving in the breeze. Suddenly he noticed a black and white puppy waddling in the damp grass by the curb. It barked sharply at him and scampered away. He snorted in disgust, then he froze! A blond boy in blue denims dashed into the street, just as a red convertible roared toward him. The car’s horn blared as the speeding driver swerved, narrowly missing the child. Distracted by the near accident, the tramp stepped into a large mud puddle, drowning his cracked shoe in filth. Disgusted and shaking, he turned and plodded slowly toward the musty room that he called home.

Both of these passages deal with the same situation but the second passage is much more interesting to read. This is because it is much more imaginative and descriptive. The underlined words are called adjectives and they help to describe things in more detail. You will notice that all these words describe nouns.

Example

frail, elderly, describe the noun tramp
black and white describe the noun puppy

and this is the function of adjectives - they describe nouns and pronouns.

You may notice that some of the adjectives end in ed or ing. Example

speeding distracted cracked disgusted shaking

These are participles that function as adjectives. Basically, adjectives tell what kind, which one, how many, or how much.
What kind?
- a brisk walk, an easy assignment, a beautiful girl,
  a savage warrior, a harassed student

Which one?
- this dress, those apples, the next bus
  the third row, the highest bid

How many?
- six apples, numerous questions
  few friends, many alternatives

Usually an adjective is placed before the noun or pronoun it describes.

However, this is not always the case.

Example
The child, howling in pain, screamed for his mother.

howling, which is a present participle functioning as an adjective, describes the
noun child.

Example
The dog, fat and content, dozed in the sun.

fat and content describe the noun dog

Also, you often find an adjective after a linking verb.

Example
The student is depressed.
The milk tastes sour.
Your eating habits are unhealthy.
Exercise I.

Print out the following exercise to complete it. Underline the adjectives in the following sentences:

Miss Perch, the night supervisor at the hospital where I took my training as a student nurse, had a reputation for authoritarian control and strict control of her staff.

Because of this awesome reputation, I was apprehensive and uneasy as I began a required shift under her supervision.

The formidable Miss Perch oversaw the entire hospital during the hours from 11:00 pm to 7:00 am (the graveyard shift).

She seemed unaware of the trail of shaking knees and sweaty palms she left behind her.

During my first night on duty, Miss Perch employed one of her famous Sneak attacks.

As anyone knows, nurses are required to wear rubber-soled white shoes to enable them to tiptoe unnoticed among sleeping and ill patients.

During an attack however, she bounded from floor to floor, and took her unsuspecting staff by surprise.

She would take the elevator to the second floor, then down to the first floor, and then up to the third.

The first indication of her arrival came when the elevator door opened. My shaking fingers released the cigarette I was holding into the nearest garbage can.
Exercise II.

Print out the following exercise to complete it.
Underline the adjectives in the following passage:

Silhouetted in the sunrise, the huge black monster - bellowing smoke and radiating intense heat - rested in its tracks. With its three human attendants nearby, the beast waited impatiently for the two extra people it would carry today. As my father and I walked closer, we could hear the rumbling, hissing, puffing threats coming from inside the creature. My fear grew as I inhaled the sulfur and brimstone it exhaled, and began to feel its hot, wet, steamy breath. As my Dad and I approached, the engineer, fireman, and conductor came to greet us. Their appearance was not the romantic figures I had imagined: the engineer was a tall, robust man with graying hair, a lined face and a booming voice; the fireman was a short, stooped, drab man whose clothes and skin were filthy with coal dust and soot. The conductor, by contrast, was a lean, tall, red-haired gentleman with a perfectly tailored black uniform.
Answer Key

Exercise I.

1. night student authoritarian strict
2. awesome apprehensive uneasy required
3. formidable entire graveyard
4. unaware unimpressed shaking sweaty
5. first famous sneak
6. rubber-soled white unnoticed sleeping ill
7. unsuspecting
8. second first third
9. first
10. shaking nearest garbage

Exercise II.

Silhouetted huge black bellowing radiating intense three human two extra rumbling hissing puffing coming hot wet steamy romantic tall robust graying lined booming short stooped drab filthy coal lean tall red-haired tailored black