Adverbs

Adverbs, like adjectives are descriptive words, but, unlike adjectives, they do not modify nouns and pronouns. Adverbs have three main functions:

1. They Modify Verbs

Example

She ran quickly - quickly tells you how the action (ran) was done.

I will see you tomorrow - tomorrow tells you when the action (see) will take place.

2. They Modify Adjectives

Example

The woman is very beautiful - very modifies the adjective beautiful. It tells you to what degree.

The child is too greedy - too modifies the adjective greedy. It tells you the degree of greediness.

3. They Modify Other Adverbs

Example

The old woman walked very slowly - very modifies the adverb slowly. It tells you how slowly.

He laughed too loudly - too modifies the adverb loudly. It tells you how loudly.


Adverbs are often misused. The most common misuse occurs with the words:
real instead of really
sure instead of surely
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good instead of well

Example

We are real sorry to have brought you this bad news.

real in this sentence should be really, because it modifies the adjective sorry, and therefore should be an adverb.

Correct

a. I am really sorry about your loss.

really is correct because it is an adverb modifying the verb sorry

b. This is real fur on the jacket.

real in sentence b is correct because it is an adjective describing fur.

Example

You sure know how to make people laugh.

sure in this sentence should be surely, because it is an adverb modifying the verb know.

Correct

a. You surely want to avoid meeting me.

surely is correct because it is an adverb modifying the verb want.

b. Are you sure about this information?

sure is correct because it modifies the pronoun you, and therefore is an adjective.

Example

You did good when you helped the old man.
good is incorrect because good is always used as an adjective. In this sentence you need an adverb to modify the verb did.

**Correct**

a. She performed *well* at the concert.

well is an adverb modifying the verb performed

b. The little boy *was good* during the concert.

good is correct because it is an adjective modifying the noun boy after the linking verb was.

**Exercise I.**

Print out the following exercise to complete it.

Underline the adverbs in the following sentences:

1. Each file had a neatly typed label.
2. The black candies have always been her favourites.
3. They had not been told about the cost of tuition.
4. My much anticipated vacation begins tomorrow.
5. They had never thought about it from that angle.
6. The fashion designers are already decreeing the styles of fall suits.
7. I have always liked the bread from that bakery.
8. They should have reported that accident immediately.
9. The team had been practising faithfully.
10. She is very beautiful but she is too aware of her beauty.
Exercise II.

Print out the following exercise to complete it. State at the end of the sentence whether the underlined word is an adjective or an adverb.

1. The early bird catches the worm.
2. I will arrive early in order to avoid the traffic.
3. The sailor watched the far horizon.
4. He will go far in the company.
5. She is an only child.
6. I only want soup for lunch.
7. Fast-food restaurants are springing up everywhere.
8. She talked fast because of her nervousness.
9. I enjoy my daily newspaper.
10. I see my mother daily.
11. They stopped publishing the weekly magazine.
12. I swim weekly but it is not enough.
13. I always attend the shareholders monthly meeting.
15. I pay my subscription monthly.
16. The air show is a yearly event.

Note

Verbs like look, taste, feel, sound, smell can cause confusion, because they can take an adjective or an adverb after them, depending on how they are used. If they are used as a linking verb (ie. state of being), they take an adjective. If they are used as active verbs, they take an adverb.
Example

a. The soup tasted good.

good is an adjective because tasted is a linking verb.

b. She tasted the soup well before she served it to her guests.

well is an adverb modifying the active verb tasted

c. The music sounds beautiful.

beautiful is an adjective modifying the noun music after the linking verb sounds.

d. She loudly sounded the bell to summon the children.

loudly is an adverb modifying the active verb sounded

Exercise III.

Print out the following exercise to complete it.

Underline the correct form of the word in parentheses.

1. He felt (secure, securely) in his mother's arms.
2. The roasting turkey smells (delicious, deliciously).
3. He felt his way (cautious, cautiously).
4. He smelled the week-old meat (cautious, cautiously).
5. She sounded the alarm (loud, loudly) as the fire broke out.
6. She looked (quick, quickly) at the clock to see how much time she had left.
7. The howling of the wolves sounded (loud, loudly) in the stillness of the night.
8. He tasted the Chinese food (enthusiastic, enthusiastically).
9. The bride looked (calm, calmly) as she made her marriage vows.
10. The casserole tasted (horrible, horribly).
Exercise IV.

Print out the following exercise to complete it.

Underline all the adverbs in the following passage:

Radio was a very powerful force during the Second World War. Radio united Americans as they had never previously been united. During the war, Americans felt patriotic, and a great deal of this patriotism belongs to the radio. Americans listened expectantly to the radio. Almost every person who is old enough can clearly recall the news that America had entered the war. On what, to many people, seemed the most peaceful of days came the fateful announcement of the attack on Pearl Harbour. From that afternoon in 1941 until peace was later declared, Americans listened attentively to their radio.

Note

Do not confuse adverbs with prepositions. Remember prepositions are always followed by a noun. The same word that functions as a preposition can be used as an adverb if it does not relate to a noun.

Example

a. She climbed up the stairs.
   
   up is a preposition followed by the noun stairs.
   
   b. She climbed up.
   
   up is an adverb telling you where she climbed modifies the verb climbed.
   
   c. He walked down the street
   
   down is a preposition related to the noun street.
   
   d. The dog lay down obediently.
   
   down is an adverb modifying the verb lay. It tells you where the dog was laying.
Exercise V.

Print out the following exercise to complete it.

State above the underlined words whether the words are prepositions or adverbs.

1. The dog sat up attentively and perked up his ears.
2. Don’t come near because you are near the security area.
3. Don’t look down because you might fall down the ravine.
4. Walk across the street and stay there until I can walk across.
5. We took a trip around the world and looked around all the famous monuments.
Answer Key

Exercise I.

1. neatly
2. always
3. not
4. much, tomorrow
5. never
6. already
7. always
8. immediately
9. faithfully
10. very, too

Exercise II.

1. adjective
2. adverb
3. adjective
4. adverb
5. adjective
6. adverb
7. adjective
8. adverb
9. adjective
10. adverb
11. adjective
12. adverb
13. adjective
14. adverb
15. adverb
16. adjective
Exercise III.

1. secure
2. delicious
3. cautiously
4. adverb
5. adjective
6. quickly
7. loudly
8. enthusiastically
9. calm
10. Horrible

Exercise IV.

very, never, previously, expectantly, almost, enough, clearly, most, later, attentively

Exercise V.

1. adverb - preposition
2. adverb - preposition
3. adverb - preposition
4. preposition - adverb
5. preposition - adverb