5

Adjectives, Adverbs, and Prepositions

5.1 Adjectives

Adjectives describe nouns. In English they are invariable — no agreement for number or gender: *a tall man, tall women, a tall building*.

5.1.1 Position

- **Attributive** (before the noun): *a **red** car, an **interesting** idea*.
- **Predicative** (after linking verbs *be, seem, look, become, feel, taste, sound*): *The car is **red**. That sounds **interesting***.
- A few adjectives are predicative only: *afraid, alone, asleep, awake, alive, glad*. ✗ *an asleep child* → ✓ *a sleeping child / The child is asleep.*

5.1.2 Order of adjectives

When several adjectives stack up before a noun, native speakers follow a fairly fixed order:

opinion	size	age	shape	colour	origin	material	purpose
lovely	big	old	round	brown	Italian	wooden	dining

a lovely big old round brown Italian wooden dining table (extreme, but grammatical). Realistic examples: *a beautiful old French mirror*, *comfortable black leather shoes*, *a small rectangular metal box*.

5.1.3 *-ed* vs. *-ing* adjectives

Key Point

-ing adjectives describe the *source* of a feeling; *-ed* adjectives describe the *person who feels* it. *The lecture was **boring**, so the students were **bored**. The news is **surprising**; we are **surprised**.* Pairs to know: *interesting/interested, exciting/excited, tiring/tired, confusing/confused, embarrassing/embarrassed, disappointing/disappointed*.

5.2 Adverbs

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, or whole sentences: *She sings **beautifully**. It's **extremely** hot. **Fortunately**, nobody was hurt.*

5.2.1 Formation

Most adverbs of manner add *-ly* to an adjective: *quick* → *quickly*, *careful* → *carefully*, *happy* → *happily*, *terrible* → *terribly*. Irregular: *good* → ***well***, and some words are the same as adjectives: *fast*, *hard*, *late*, *early*, *high*, *low*, *straight*.

Common Error

- *hardly* is not the adverb of *hard*: *He works* ***hard*** (= with effort) vs. *He* ***hardly*** *works* (= almost never).
- *lately* is not the adverb of *late*: *He arrived* ***late*** vs. *Have you seen her* ***lately***? (= recently).
- After linking verbs, use an adjective, not an adverb: ✗ *The soup tastes deliciously.* → ✓ *The soup tastes delicious.* ✓ *I feel bad about it* (not *badly*, in careful usage).

5.2.2 Position of adverbs

- **Manner, place, time** usually come at the end, in that order: *She sang* ***beautifully at the concert last night***.
- **Frequency adverbs** (*always*, *often*, *never*. . .) go before the main verb, after *be*, and after the first auxiliary: *He* ***often*** *travels. He is* ***often*** *away. He has* ***often*** *been to Japan.*
- Never place an adverb between verb and direct object: ✗ *She speaks fluently English.* → ✓ *She speaks English fluently.*

5.3 Comparatives and superlatives

5.3.1 Formation

Type	Comparative	Superlative
one syllable	*older, taller, nicer*	*the oldest, the tallest*
one syllable, CVC	*bigger, hotter, thinner*	*the biggest, the hottest*
two syllables in *-y*	*happier, easier*	*the happiest, the easiest*
longer adjectives	*more modern, more expensive*	*the most modern, the most expensive*
irregular	*better, worse, further/farther, less, more*	*the best, the worst, the furthest, the least, the most*

5.3.2 Patterns

- *than* after comparatives: *She is taller* ***than*** *her brother.*
- *as . . . as* for equality: *He is* ***as*** *tall* ***as*** *his father. It's not* ***as*** *easy* ***as*** *it looks.*
- Softening or strengthening: ***a bit*** *colder,* ***much/far*** *better,* ***slightly*** *more expensive.*
- Repeated comparative = continuing change: *The queue got* ***longer and longer***.
- *the . . . the*: ***The more*** *you practise,* ***the easier*** *it gets.*

Common Error

✗ *more better, more easier* → ✓ *better, easier* (never combine *more* with an *-er* form). ✗ *She is taller than me think.* — after *than*, use object pronouns informally (*taller than me*) or a full clause formally (*taller than I am*).

5.4 Prepositions

5.4.1 Prepositions of place: *in, on, at*

	Idea	Examples
in	inside a 3-D space or area	*in the box, in the kitchen, in London, in Brazil, in the car*
on	touching a surface or line	*on the table, on the wall, on the floor, on the coast, on the bus/train/plane*
at	at a point; at an event	*at the door, at the bus stop, at the airport, at a party, at work, at home*

5.4.2 Prepositions of time: *in, on, at*

	Used for	Examples
in	months, years, seasons, parts of the day, periods	*in May, in 2024, in winter, in the morning, in ten minutes*
on	days and dates	*on Monday, on 4 July, on Friday morning, on my birthday*
at	clock times, points, holidays as periods	*at six o'clock, at noon, at night, at the weekend (BrE), at Christmas*

Key Point

No preposition before *last, next, this, every, yesterday, tomorrow*: ✗ *on last Monday* → ✓ *last Monday*; ✗ *in this morning* → ✓ *this morning*.

5.4.3 Movement and other common prepositions

to (direction: *go to school* — but *go home*, no *to*); *into/out of* (entering/leaving); *from . . . to*; *through* (a tunnel), *across* (a road), *along* (a river), *over/under*, *between* (two) and *among* (more than two, as a group); *by* (= next to; also means of transport: *by bus, by car* — but *on foot*); *for* (duration: *for two hours*), *during* (inside a named period: *during the meeting*), *since* (starting point: *since 2019*).

Common Error

- ✗ *arrive to the airport* → ✓ *arrive at the airport / arrive in Paris*
- ✗ *depend of* → ✓ *depend on*
- ✗ *married with a doctor* → ✓ *married to a doctor*
- ✗ *listen music* → ✓ *listen to music*
- ✗ *discuss about the plan* → ✓ *discuss the plan*
- ✗ *explain me the rule* → ✓ *explain the rule to me*

Exercises

Exercise 5.1 Adjective or adverb?

Choose the correct word.

1. She dances really (beautiful / beautifully).

2. The exam was surprisingly (easy / easily).
3. He drives too (fast / fastly).
4. I did (good / well) in the test, and I feel (good / well) about it.
5. The team played (bad / badly) in the first half.

Exercise 5.2 Comparatives and superlatives

Complete with the correct form of the adjective in brackets.

1. This is _____ (bad) film I've ever seen.
2. My new flat is much _____ (big) than the old one.
3. The test wasn't as _____ (difficult) as I expected.
4. _____ (far) you go from the coast, _____ (dry) the climate becomes.
5. She's one of _____ (talented) musicians in the country.

Exercise 5.3 in, on, or at?

Fill each gap with *in*, *on*, or *at*.

1. The meeting is _____ Tuesday _____ 3 p.m.
2. She was born _____ 1998 _____ a small town _____ the north of Spain.
3. I'll see you _____ the bus stop _____ the morning.
4. There's a stain _____ your shirt.
5. He isn't _____ work today; he's _____ home.

Exercise 5.4 Word order

Put the words in the correct order.

1. bought / leather / Italian / an / she / beautiful / handbag
2. English / speaks / very / he / fluently
3. always / on time / is / the / train / almost
4. last night / at the theatre / wonderfully / performed / the actors