

# Adjectives

## Following the Order of Adjectives in English

Adjectives modify nouns and pronouns. In English, an adjective usually comes directly before the word it describes or after a linking verb (a form of *be* or a “sense” verb such as *look*, *seem*, and *taste*), in which case it modifies the subject. In each of the following two sentences, the adjective is **boldfaced** and the noun it describes is *italicized*.

That is a **false** *story*.

The *story* is **false**.

When more than one adjective modifies the same noun, the adjectives are usually stated in a certain order, though there are often exceptions. Following is the typical order of English adjectives:

### *Typical Order of Adjectives in a Series*

- 1 Article or other noun marker:** a, an, the, Lee’s, this, three, your
- 2 Opinion adjective:** dull, handsome, unfair, useful
- 3 Size:** big, huge, little, tiny
- 4 Shape:** long, short, round, square
- 5 Age:** ancient, medieval, old, new, young
- 6 Color:** blue, green, scarlet, white
- 7 Nationality:** Italian, Korean, Mexican, Vietnamese
- 8 Religion:** Buddhist, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim
- 9 Material:** cardboard, gold, marble, silk
- 10 Noun used as an adjective:** house (as in *house call*), tea (as in *tea bag*), wall (as in *wall hanging*)

Here are some examples of the above order:

**a long cotton** scarf

**the beautiful little silver** cup

**your new lavender evening** gown

**Ana's sweet Mexican** grandmother

In general, use no more than two or three adjectives after the article or another noun marker. Numerous adjectives in a series can be awkward: **the beautiful big new blue cotton** sweater.

## Using the Present and Past Participles as Adjectives



The present participle ends in *-ing*. Past participles of regular verbs end in *-ed* or *-d*; a list of the past participles of many common irregular verbs appears on pages 446–448. Both types of participles may be used as adjectives. A participle used as an adjective may precede the word it describes: That was an **exciting** *ball game*. It may also follow a linking verb and describe the subject of the sentence: The *ball game* was **exciting**.

While both present and past participles of a particular verb may be used as adjectives, their meanings differ. Use the present participle to describe whoever or whatever causes a feeling: an **embarrassing** *incident* (the incident is what causes the embarrassment). Use the past participle to describe whoever or whatever experiences the feeling: the **embarrassed** *parents* (the parents are the ones who are embarrassed).

The long day of holiday shopping was **tiring**.

The shoppers were **tired**.

Following are pairs of present and past participles with similar distinctions:

annoying / annoyed

exhausting / exhausted

boring / bored

fascinating / fascinated

confusing / confused

frightening / frightened

depressing / depressed

surprising / surprised

exciting / excited

**ACTIVITY 1**

Underline the correct form in parentheses.

1. The Johnsons live in a (stone big, big stone) house.
2. Mr. Kim runs a (popular Korean, Korean popular) restaurant.
3. For her party, the little girl asked if her mother would buy her a (beautiful long velvet, beautiful velvet long) dress.
4. When their son didn't come home by bedtime, Mr. and Mrs. Singh became (worried, worrying).
5. In the center of the city is a church with (three enormous colorful stained-glass, three stained-glass colorful enormous) windows.

**ACTIVITY 2**

Underline the correct form in parentheses.

1. The candies came in a (little red cardboard, cardboard red little) box.
2. The creek is spanned by (an old wooden, a wooden old) bridge.
3. A gunshot left (a tiny round, a round tiny) hole in the car's rear windshield.
4. Many people find public speaking a (terrifying, terrified) experience.
5. The museum acquired (an ancient marble, a marble ancient) statue from Greece.