

BETTER WAYS  
• with •  
ADJECTIVES  
& ADVERBS

Heidi Platt

Don't I look well in  
my new outfit?

I hope you are well.  
You certainly look good  
in that outfit.



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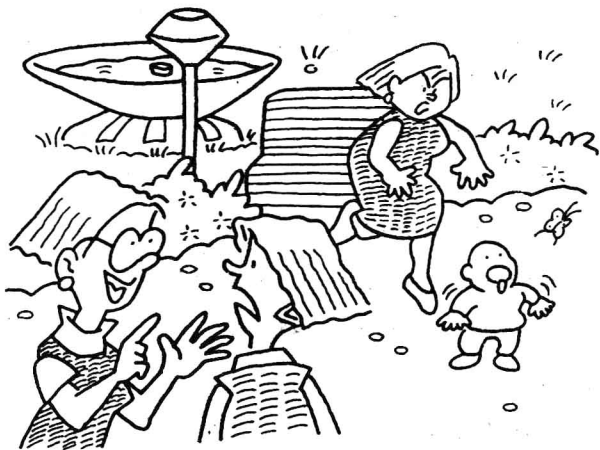
**ADJECTIVES  
& ADVERBS**

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## Very Much Alive



**Emma:** Look at **Mary**! She's got an **alive** child!

**Doris** (laughs): I should hope so!

**Emma** (puzzled): **What** do you mean?

**W**hy did Doris laugh? *Alive* is generally used as an opposite to 'dead'. For example, sergeant to his men:

We must take **him** — dead or alive!

What Emma really means is that Mary has got a *lively* child, a child that is full of activity, very active.

*Alive* cannot occur in front of nouns. It can only appear after the verb BE and verbs like *feel*, *seem*, etc., e.g.

*Mr Ong is nearly eighty but he's still very much **alive** (active, full of life).*

There are many adjectives in English which can be used 'attributively', before a noun, e.g. 'a lively child', and also 'predicatively', e.g. 'the child is lively'. However, there are some adjectives which can only appear before nouns, e.g. *mere*. It is possible to say:

*She's a **mere** child*

but not

*The child is **mere**.*

On the other hand, it is possible to say:

*My brother was fast **asleep***

but not

*My **asleep** brother.*

Adjectives which can appear both before nouns and after the verbs *be*, *become*, *seem*, *feel* etc. (the so-called Copulas or Linking Verbs) are sometimes called CENTRAL. For example, *intelligent* is a central adjective, e.g.

*An **intelligent** child.*

*Mary is very **intelligent**.*

*He wants to marry someone **intelligent**.*



The last example, where the adjective immediately follows the noun, is really a short version of 'someone who is intelligent'.

We'll talk more about Central Adjectives in Chapter 10.

There are a number of adjectives starting with *a*—but not all of them are central adjectives. We have already seen that *alive* isn't one, nor is *asleep*. *Awake* and *asleep* rarely appear before nouns, e.g.

*Don't disturb her, she's already asleep.*

*You could have phoned me at six, I was awake.*

But not

*An asleep person, an awake person.*

On the other hand, 'alert' and 'aloof' can be used both attributively and predicatively, e.g.

*An aloof person — somebody who keeps very much to him/herself.*

*Anthony is very much aloof.*

*An alert child.*

*A good driver has to be alert at all times.*

## Exhausted Or Exhausting?



**Jane:** Oh, I'm very **exhausting**!

**Fred** (laughs): Yes, I know you are!

**W**hy is Fred amused? There are many adjectives which have been formed from verb forms, either ending in -ing or in -ed, e.g. *exciting* and *excited*. They have both been formed from the verb *to excite* but their meaning is different, e.g.

*An **exciting** person — a person who **excites** others, other people find him/her very interesting and stimulating.*

*An **excited** child — the child was **excited** by something (a party, a visit, a present etc.).*

The same goes for exhausting/exhausted. Jane wanted to say that *she was exhausted*, that is, something or some activity or activities exhausted her (e.g. work, shopping). What she did, in fact, say was that she was an exhausting person, which would mean that she 'exhausted people'.

Other ing/ed pairs are:

***bored/boring**: I was thoroughly **bored** (something **bored** me).*

*The movie was really **boring**.*

***frightened/frightening**: Pete was **frightened** by the thunderstorm.*

*It was a **frightening** experience.*

Some -ed adjectives have no corresponding verbs, e.g.

***unexpected**: What an **unexpected** visit!*

***talented**: She's a really **talented** student.*

***diseased**: Everybody in that slum dwelling was **diseased**.*

With many ing/ed adjectives, however, the verbal force can still be felt, e.g. I was insulted (by her behaviour). Others seem to have become to some extent true adjectives. A good test is to use the adverb *very*. If an ed/ing adjective can be modified by *very* is has lost to a great extent its 'verbal' character, e.g.

It is not possible to say:

*I was **very** insulted*

but it is possible to say

*That was a **very** interesting story.*

## For The Matured Woman



**Alison** (pointing to the sign): They must think we are cheeses?

**W**hy did Alison say that? Well, there is, in fact, a word *matured* which is the Past Participle of the verb *to mature*. *Matured* is used when talking about wines which have been put down for some time, or for cheeses, e.g.

*This wine/cheese has **matured** well. It has a really interesting flavour.*

The word which should have been used in the advertisement is the adjective *mature*. It means 'fully grown or developed' and has been used as a euphemism for 'older', particularly with regard to cosmetics, e.g. for the mature woman, for the mature skin.

*Mature* is not the only adjective where -d is added unnecessarily another one is *tense*, which can refer to objects, parts of the body or people, e.g.

*You could see she was very **tensed**.*

It should be

*You could see she was **tense**.*

Another example of adding -d when it is not needed is a *hired* car.

The verb *to hire* is used in British English for getting the use of something, usually for a short time, and paying for it. It can also mean 'to employ someone' (usually for a short time), e.g.,

*We had to **hire** a couple of extra people for Margot's wedding.*

In American English, *hire* means 'to employ or appoint for a job' and the employment could be for years.

*Hired* can be used as an adjective, e.g.

*He was just a **hired** hand.*

*They suspected the man to be a **hired** killer.*

However, the noun *hire* can function like an adjective in front of other nouns, e.g. *a hire car* (a car for hire).

There are quite a number of nouns which can function in this way, e.g.

**city council:** *a **council** for the city*

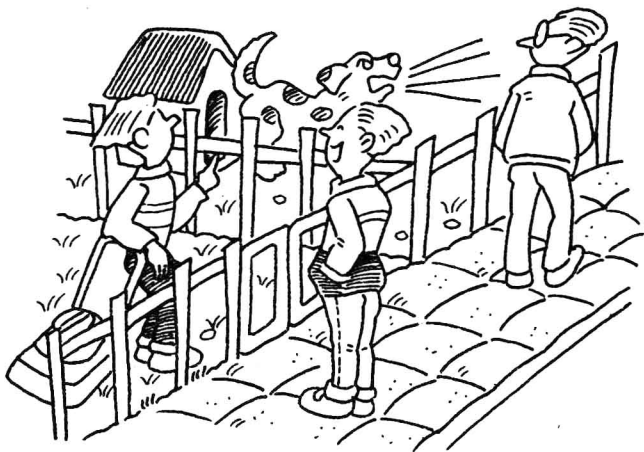
**brick wall:** *a wall made of **bricks***

**wood stove:** *a **stove** for burning wood*

**Easter holidays:** ***holidays** occurring around Easter*

In these constructions, the noun used like an adjective is immediately before the noun it modifies (see Chapter 10).

## Continuous Or Continual?



**Brendan** (pointing to the dog): I'm fed up with its **contin-**  
**ous** barking!

**Peter** (laughs): Surely he must stop sometimes!

Is Brendan using the correct adjective? Strictly speaking he isn't.

*Continuous* means that things or events continue without stopping for quite some time, e.g.

*This machine runs **continuously** for ten hours.*



*Continual* means that actions, which are often annoying to the speaker or writer, are repeated over and over again. It does not mean that they are going on all the time but usually they stop and then start again, e.g.

*The **continual** barking of our neighbour's dog is really annoying us.*

*They have tradesmen next door and the **continual** hammering is nearly driving us crazy (the hammering may stop and then start again, and so on).*

*He left his wife because of her **continual** nagging.*

In English there are word endings which clearly show that the word is an adjective. Typical adjective endings would be

**ous**: continuous, generous, dangerous

**able**: adorable, likable, comfortable

**al**: continual, seasonal, local

**ful**: harmful, helpful, careful

**ish**: foolish, (and suggesting shades of certain colours) reddish having a reddish tinge, greyish, greenish

**ive**: sportive, exhaustive, restive

**less**: aimless, useless, colourless, shapeless

**y**: greedy, airy, haughty

Some of these endings, such as -able, -ful and -less, indicate to some extent the meaning of the adjective, e.g.

**harmful**: (*full of harm*) not being very good, causing harm

**useless**: *being of no use*