

Adjectives

Adjectives describe nouns and pronouns. An adjective can express *which one(s)*, *what kind or condition*, or *how many*.

Their new apartment is **small**.
Only **two** apartments are **smaller**.

Which? **Their** apartment. What kind? **New** and **small**.
How many? **Two** apartments. What kind? **Smaller**.

Adjectives often come before the noun: **their new** apartment. But it is also common for the adjective to follow a linking verb like *is*: *Their new apartment is **small***. In both examples, the adjectives describe the *apartment*. The articles **the**, **an**, and **a** are types of adjectives. They express *which one*.

An adjective can describe a pronoun as well:

She is **tired**.
They are **eager** to play.
It is the **smallest**.

Commas with adjectives

When you have multiple adjectives in front of a noun, you usually separate them with commas. However, we do not place a comma after an article or between the last adjective and the noun.

It's **a bright, sunny** day.

Order of adjectives

Adding more adjectives does not necessarily improve a sentence. You can limit yourself to two or three in most cases. (The example below uses five—which is probably too many.) Usually you can achieve better results using stronger verbs and more vivid nouns instead of a lot of adjectives. Complex rules exist for the order of adjectives if you do use several in a sentence. For instance, articles (*the*, *a*) always come first. Adjectives describing subjective judgments (*priceless* or *worthless*) follow. Size adjectives (*large* or *tiny*) come before color adjectives (*blue* or *colorless*), which in turn come before those describing what material something is made of (*linen* or *crystalline*).

*The **priceless, large, colorless, crystalline** stone was set in platinum.*

Related topics

For more information, check an English language or ESL reference such as The Guide to Grammar and Writing offered by the Capital Community College Foundation. Look for topics like these:

- using commas with adjectives
- coordinate adjectives
- compound adjectives
- order of adjectives in a series
- comparative and superlative adjectives

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