Prefixes, numbers, word order and participles

Introduction



Maria drives a big, blue car. She enjoys her 20-minute journey to work.

Adjectives with numbers

We can make adjectives with numbers and nouns. For example:

It's a 4-hour flight.
We need a three-week training course.
They live in a two-bedroom apartment.
He's writing a 20-page report.
He's giving a 15-minute presentation.

Note that

1. **We can write the number as a word or a number:**

   a 3-storey building
   a three-storey building

2. **These adjectives never have a plural form:**

   This apartment has two bedrooms. ✔
   It's a two-bedrooms apartment. ✖
   It's a two-bedroom apartment. ✔

Word order of adjectives

When we use more than one adjective, we need to place them in the correct order. This is

the most usual order:

1. Opinion	2. Size	3. Colour	4. Nationality	5. Material
nice	big	red	French	wooden
lovely	small	blue	English	metal
beautiful	long	yellow	Spanish	plastic
horrible	short	brown	Italian	cotton
delicious	tall	blonde	German	glass

For example:

She wore a lovely long, blue dress.
I have some beautiful yellow chairs.
She has short, dark hair.
It was a horrible plastic table.
We had a delicious Spanish wine.
I bought a wonderful big, brown, Italian leather handbag.

Present and past participles

We use the present and past participles of some regular verbs as adjectives.

'ing'	describes a quality or cause	It was a frightening experience.
'ed'	describes an effect or feeling	I was frightened.

We can describe a person as 'boring', 'annoying', 'exciting' etc. but we rarely use the 'ing' form with 'I' so:

I'm exciting about that. ✘
I'm excited about that. ✓
He's exciting to be with. ✓ **[I'm never bored when I'm with him.']**

The exercise confused us.	The exercise was confusing so...	...we were confused.
Edward interests me.	He's an interesting man.	I'm interested in him.
This book bores me.	It's a boring book.	I'm bored with this book.

Here are some more examples:

'ing' adjective	'ed' adjective
tiring	tired
exciting	excited
frightening	frightened
surprising	surprised
worrying	worried
annoying	annoyed
embarrassing	embarrassed
fascinating	fascinated

Note that

1. **We rarely place this kind of 'ed' adjective directly before a noun.**

   I spoke to an annoyed man. ✗
   I spoke to a man who was annoyed. ✓

2. **There are some 'ing' adjectives that do not have this kind of meaning. They are gerunds which we use as adjectives to specify different *kinds* of things. For example:**

   He had to show the policeman his driving licence.
   I'm starting a new training course.

Negative prefixes

To make some adjectives negative, we use prefixes. Almost all these adjectives have only one possible prefix - 'un', 'in' and 'dis' are not interchangeable. Although, there are some adjectives which use 'un' and 'dis' e.g. 'unsatisfied' and 'dissatisfied'; 'unorganised' and 'disorganised', these words have subtly different meanings. If you are not sure, check in a good dictionary.

It's always a good idea to learn the negative form when you learn a new adjective. Here are some examples:

Prefix	Used with	Examples
un	some adjectives beginning with a vowel or a consonant	unreasonable, unhappy, unpopular, unavailable, unusual, unable
in	some adjectives beginning with a vowel (except i and u) or a consonant	inactive, indecent, indecisive, incomplete

ir	**some adjectives beginning with 'r'**	**irregular, irresponsible, irrational, irresistible**
il	**some adjectives beginning with 'l'**	**illegal, illiterate, illegitimate, illegible, illogical**
im	**some adjectives beginning with 'm' or 'p'**	**immature, immoderate, impossible, impatient, immoral, immobile, imperfect**
dis	**some adjectives beginning with a vowel or a consonant**	**disloyal, dishonest, dissatisfied, disobedient**

Note that we don't use negative prefixes with all adjectives. Sometimes we need a different word.
For example:

big ≠ small
soft ≠ hard

Be careful because some English adjectives have more than one meaning and different opposites. For example:

light [5g] ≠ heavy [2kg]
light ≠ dark [colours]

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