

# Adverbs of degree

## Introduction



I'm **extremely** unhappy about this. I'd like you to investigate the problem **thoroughly** and call me back this afternoon.

## Definition

Adverbs of degree tell us about the strength or intensity of something. <?xml:namespace prefix = "o" ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />

## Uses

We use them with verbs, adjectives and other adverbs to answer this kind of question: 'How much?'; 'How little?' or 'To what extent?'

Some adverbs of degree can only be used with adjectives and adverbs and others only with verbs.

Here are some common examples:

| Adverb | Use                             | Examples   |
|--------|---------------------------------|--|
| enough | To mean 'to a necessary degree' | Is this room big <b>enough</b> ?<br><br>I'm not sleeping <b>enough</b> at the moment.<br><br>They're now working fast <b>enough</b> to keep up with the deadlines. |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <p><b>hardly, barely, scarcely</b></p> | <p><b>To mean 'almost not at all'</b></p>                                       | <p>It was so hot last night that I <b>hardly</b> slept.</p> <p>He's speaking very quietly - I can <b>barely</b> hear him.</p> <p>I could <b>scarcely</b> believe it when she told me - I was so surprised.</p> |
| <p><b>less</b></p>                     | <p><b>To mean 'to a smaller degree'</b></p>                                     | <p>We need to spend <b>less</b>.</p> <p>This option is <b>less</b> expensive.</p> <p>This team is working <b>less</b> efficiently than the others.</p>   |
| <p><b>least</b></p>                    | <p><b>To mean 'to the smallest degree'</b></p>                                  | <p>This is what I <b>least</b> like doing.</p> <p>This option is the <b>least</b> expensive.</p>   |
| <p><b>very</b></p>                     | <p><b>As an intensifier</b></p>   | <p>This option is <b>very</b> expensive.</p> <p>She plays the piano <b>very</b> well.</p>  |
| <p><b>absolutely</b></p>               | <p><b>1. As an intensifier</b></p> <p><b>2. To mean 'completely'</b></p>        | <p>Our trip was <b>absolutely</b> amazing.</p> <p>She dances <b>absolutely</b> beautifully.</p> <p>I <b>absolutely</b> agree with you.</p>   |
| <p><b>so</b></p>                       | <p><b>As an intensifier</b></p>   | <p>This option is <b>so</b> expensive.</p> <p>The time is going <b>so</b> slowly today.</p>  |
| <p><b>too</b></p>                      | <p><b>As an intensifier - to mean 'more than is necessary or desirable'</b></p> | <p>This option is <b>too</b> expensive.</p> <p>You're speaking <b>too</b> quickly - I can't understand you.</p>  |
| <p><b>quite, rather, pretty</b></p>    | <p><b>As an intensifier [see note below]</b></p>                                | <p>The weather's <b>quite</b> nice at the moment.</p> <p>He's doing <b>rather</b> well in his new job.</p>   |

**Note that** some adverbs of degree are also adverbs of manner with different meanings. For example:

| Adverb of degree                                       | Adverb of manner - related to the meaning of the adjective      |
|--|---|
| I've <b>practically</b> finished. [almost]             | This office was designed very practically. [in a practical way] |
| They're not <b>terribly*</b> likely to succeed. [very] | She sings terribly. [very badly]                                |
| That's <b>perfectly</b> ridiculous. [absolutely]       | You pronounced that word perfectly.                             |
| I <b>thoroughly</b> enjoyed the film. [really]         | We need to check the contract thoroughly. [in detail]           |
| It's a <b>fairly</b> good result. [quite]              | He judged the competition fairly. [impartially]                 |

For more information and to find exact definitions, refer to a good dictionary because the meanings of adverbs of degree aren't always clear. Here are some more examples:

|            |            |            |           |
|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| almost     | extremely  | moderately | rather    |
| absolutely | fully      | most       | simply    |
| badly*     | greatly    | much       | somewhat  |
| completely | highly     | nearly     | strongly  |
| decidedly  | incredibly | partially  | totally   |
| deeply     | indeed     | positively | utterly   |
| enormously | intensely  | pretty*    | virtually |
| entirely   | little     | purely     |           |

\* informal

## Construction

The word order varies. These are the most common structures but please refer to example sentences in a good dictionary if in doubt:

| Position of adverb | Examples |
|--------------------|----------|
|--------------------|----------|

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>With verbs</b>                                 | <b>Before the main verb most of the time</b>   | <b>I <u>absolutely</u> love chocolate.</b><br><b>I <u>just</u> want to ask you a few questions.</b><br><b>He <u>hardly</u> recognised her.</b><br><b>She doesn't <u>quite</u> understand.</b><br><b>We've <u>almost</u> finished.</b> |
|   | <b>With stative verbs that express opinions, we can place the adverb before or after the verb</b>      | <b>I <u>completely</u> agree.</b><br><b>I <u>agree</u> completely.</b><br><b>We <u>strongly</u> believe we should expand.</b><br><b>We <u>believe</u> strongly that we should expand.</b>   |
|   | <b>With some adverbs that mean 'very much', the adverb comes after the verb</b>                        | <b>I <u>enjoyed</u> it immensely.</b><br><b>Salaries <u>vary</u> enormously in this company.</b>  |
|   | <b>Adverbs which are intensifiers go before the verb</b>   | <b>I <u>really</u> want to join this team.</b><br><b>I <u>absolutely</u> hate working late on Fridays.</b>  |
|   | <b>Note that when we use <u>absolutely</u> to mean 'completely' it can be before or after the verb</b> | <b>I <u>absolutely</u> agree.</b><br><b>I <u>agree</u> absolutely.</b>  |
| <b>With adjectives</b>                            | <b>Before the adjective</b>  | <b>He's <u>extremely</u> rich.</b><br><b>She's <u>rather</u> nice.</b><br><b>Lunch is <u>nearly</u> ready.</b><br><b>The situation is <u>utterly</u> ridiculous.</b>  |
| <b>With adverbs of manner, time and frequency</b> | <b>Before the adverb</b>   | <b>They always arrive <u>really</u> late.</b><br><b>We go there <u>quite</u> often.</b><br><b>He's progressing <u>moderately</u> well.</b><br><b>The project is going <u>fairly</u> smoothly.</b>                                     |

**Note that** an exception is **enough** which is placed after verbs, adjectives and other adverbs:

Some people don't walk enough.

This car isn't **big enough** for us.  
She isn't working **quickly enough**.

[See also **enough** as a **quantifier**.]

## Very, so, too

**Very** and **so** have similar meanings.

She's **very** happy in her new job.  
She's **so** happy in her new job.

But **so** is much more informal and conversational. It is also often used in this kind of sentence:

I'm **so** tired that I'll probably fall asleep in the meeting this afternoon.  
Our office is **so** small that we can't fit another computer in here.  
He works **so** slowly that he never finishes anything on time.

**Too** is different. It suggests an excess - more than is needed or desired.

This computer screen is **too** small - I need a bigger one.  
He takes life **too** seriously; he should relax more.

It is often used in this kind of sentence:

It's **too** dark to see in here - can you switch the light on?  
This desk is **too** big to fit in my office.  
He's **too** young and inexperienced for this job.  
They're speaking **too** loudly for an open office; I can't concentrate.

**Too** also has another meaning as an adverb of degree. In conversation, it can mean 'very' or 'completely':

I'm not **too** happy about this; I hope you can find a solution.  
He's not **too** sure what to do about it.

## Very, absolutely

These are intensifiers with the same meaning. We use **very** with base adjectives and **absolutely** with extreme adjectives. For example:

| Base adjective   | Extreme adjective                                       |
|------------------|---|
| very cold        | absolutely freezing                                     |
| very hot         | absolutely boiling                                      |
| very good        | absolutely wonderful, amazing, brilliant, fabulous etc. |
| very interesting | absolutely fascinating                                  |
| very hungry      | absolutely starving, famished                           |
| very attractive  | absolutely beautiful, gorgeous etc.                     |
| very big         | absolutely huge, enormous, gigantic etc.                |

### Note that

1. With both kinds of adjectives, we can use **really**, which is more conversational than **very**:

I saw a **really** good film last night.  
It's **really** cold at the moment.

2. We do not usually use intensifiers with non-gradable adjectives. For example, 'empty', 'dead', 'correct', 'wrong' or 'impossible'. There are no degrees - someone is either dead or not; something is correct or it is not. However, in informal conversation, we sometimes use **absolutely** with these:

We couldn't get into the restaurant last night - it was **absolutely** full.  
You're **absolutely** right; I couldn't agree more.  
Are you **absolutely** sure about that?

3. We also use **absolutely** with extreme verbs:

I **absolutely** love chocolate.  
He **absolutely** adores her.  
They **absolutely** refuse to work late.

## Quite, pretty, rather, fairly

These are all similar. With **base** and **gradable adjectives**, **quite** can suggest either 'a little' or 'a lot' depending on which word in a sentence is stressed. The others are more likely to be unstressed and used in a positive way.

This car is **quite** big. [but not exceptionally or surprisingly so]  
This car is **quite** *big*. [maybe bigger than expected]

I **quite** enjoyed the party. [it was ok, not great]

I **quite** enjoyed the party. [a lot, maybe more than I expected to]

She can type **quite** fast. [fast enough]

She can type **quite** fast. [very fast]

With **extreme** and some **non-gradable adjectives**, **quite** is used to mean 'completely' or 'absolutely'.

Are you **quite** certain?

The meal was **quite** delicious.

### Note that

1. In American English, **pretty** is much more commonly used. **Quite** and **rather** are more rare.
2. We use **quite** and **rather** with some verbs that express feelings but not **fairly** or **pretty**:

I **quite/rather** like it. ✓

I **fairly/pretty** like it. ✗

3. When we use these with an adjective and a singular noun, the word order varies:

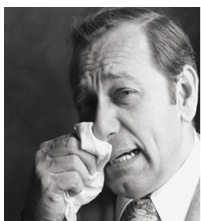
We had **quite** a good time.

We had **rather** a good time.

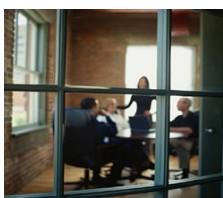
We had a **fairly** good time.

We had a **pretty** good time.

## Examples



It's **so** annoying to have a cold.



We got through the agenda **rather** quickly today - let's have an early

## **lunch.**



I can **highly** recommend this hotel.



That's **simply** wonderful news - congratulations!



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