

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 enough ? I'm not sleeping enough at the moment. They're now working fast enough to keep up with the deadlines.

<p>hardly, barely, scarcely</p>	<p>To mean 'almost not at all'</p>	<p>It was so hot last night that I hardly slept.</p> <p>He's speaking very quietly - I can barely hear him.</p> <p>I could scarcely believe it when she told me - I was so surprised.</p>
<p>less</p>	<p>To mean 'to a smaller degree'.</p>	<p>We need to spend less.</p> <p>This option is less expensive.</p> <p>This team is working less efficiently than the others.</p>
<p>least</p>	<p>To mean 'to the smallest degree'</p>	<p>This is what I least like doing.</p> <p>This option is the least expensive.</p>
<p>very</p>	<p>As an intensifier</p>	<p>This option is very expensive.</p> <p>She plays the piano very well.</p>
<p>absolutely</p>	<p>1. As an intensifier</p> <p>2. To mean 'completely'</p>	<p>Our trip was absolutely amazing.</p> <p>She dances absolutely beautifully.</p> <p>I absolutely agree with you.</p>
<p>so</p>	<p>As an intensifier</p>	<p>This option is so expensive.</p> <p>The time is going so slowly today.</p>
<p>too</p>	<p>As an intensifier - to mean 'more than is necessary or desirable'</p>	<p>This option is too expensive.</p> <p>You're speaking too quickly - I can't understand you.</p>
<p>quite, rather, pretty</p>	<p>As an intensifier [see note below]</p>	<p>The weather's quite nice at the moment.</p> <p>He's doing rather 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 practically finished. [almost]	This office was designed very practically. [in a practical way]
They're not terribly* likely to succeed. [very]	She sings terribly. [very badly]
That's perfectly ridiculous. [absolutely]	You pronounced that word perfectly.
I thoroughly enjoyed the film. [really]	We need to check the contract thoroughly. [in detail]
It's a fairly 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
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With verbs	Before the main verb most of the time	I absolutely <u>love</u> chocolate. I just <u>want</u> to ask you a few questions. He hardly <u>recognised</u> her. She doesn't quite <u>understand</u> . We've almost <u>finished</u> .
	With stative verbs that express opinions, we can place the adverb before or after the verb	I completely <u>agree</u> . I <u>agree</u> completely . We strongly <u>believe</u> we should expand. We <u>believe</u> strongly that we should expand. I somewhat <u>doubt</u> it. I <u>doubt</u> it somewhat .
	With some adverbs that mean 'very much', the adverb comes after the verb	I <u>enjoyed</u> it immensely . Salaries <u>vary</u> enormously in this company.
	Adverbs which are intensifiers go before the verb	I really <u>want</u> to join this team. I absolutely <u>hate</u> working late on Fridays.
	Note that when we use absolutely to mean 'completely' it can be before or after the verb	I absolutely <u>agree</u> . I <u>agree</u> absolutely .
With adjectives	Before the adjective	He's extremely <u>rich</u> . She's rather <u>nice</u> . Lunch is nearly <u>ready</u> . The situation is utterly <u>ridiculous</u> .
With adverbs of manner, time and frequency	Before the adverb	They always arrive really <u>late</u> . We go there quite <u>often</u> . He's progressing moderately <u>well</u> . The project is going fairly <u>smoothly</u> .

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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