

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

<b>hardly, barely, scarcely</b>	<b>To mean 'almost not at all'</b>	<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>
<b>less</b>	<b>To mean 'to a smaller degree'.</b>	<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>
<b>least</b>	<b>To mean 'to the smallest degree'</b>	<p>This is what I <b>least</b> like doing.</p> <p>This option is the <b>least</b> expensive.</p>
<b>very</b>	<b>As an intensifier</b>	<p>This option is <b>very</b> expensive.</p> <p>She plays the piano <b>very</b> well.</p>
<b>absolutely</b>	<p>1. As an intensifier</p> <p>2. To mean 'completely'</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>
<b>so</b>	<b>As an intensifier</b>	<p>This option is <b>so</b> expensive.</p> <p>The time is going <b>so</b> slowly today.</p>
<b>too</b>	<b>As an intensifier - to mean 'more than is necessary or desirable'</b>	<p>This option is <b>too</b> expensive.</p> <p>You're speaking <b>too</b> quickly - I can't understand you.</p>
<b>quite, rather, pretty</b>	<b>As an intensifier [see note below]</b>	<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 absolutely badly* completely decidedly deeply enormously entirely	extremely fully greatly highly incredibly indeed intensely little	moderately most much nearly partially positively pretty* purely	rather simply somewhat strongly totally utterly virtually
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\* 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 <b>absolutely</b> <u>love</u> chocolate. I <b>just</b> <u>want</u> to ask you a few questions. He <b>hardly</b> <u>recognised</u> her. She doesn't <b>quite</b> <u>understand</u> . We've <b>almost</b> <u>finished</u> .
	With stative verbs that express opinions, we can place the adverb before or after the verb	I <b>completely</b> <u>agree</u> . I <u>agree</u> <b>completely</b> .  We <b>strongly</b> <u>believe</u> we should expand. We <u>believe</u> <b>strongly</b> that we should expand.  I <b>somewhat</b> <u>doubt</u> it. I <u>doubt</u> it <b>somewhat</b> .
	With some adverbs that mean 'very much', the adverb comes after the verb	I <u>enjoyed</u> it <b>immensely</b> . Salaries <u>vary</u> <b>enormously</b> in this company.
	Adverbs which are intensifiers go before the verb	I <b>really</b> <u>want</u> to join this team. I <b>absolutely</b> <u>hate</u> working late on Fridays.
	Note that when we use <b>absolutely</b> to mean 'completely' it can be before or after the verb	I <b>absolutely</b> <u>agree</u> . I <u>agree</u> <b>absolutely</b> .
With adjectives	Before the adjective	He's <b>extremely</b> <u>rich</u> . She's <b>rather</b> <u>nice</u> . Lunch is <b>nearly</b> <u>ready</u> . The situation is <b>utterly</b> <u>ridiculous</u> .
With adverbs of manner, time and frequency	Before the adverb	They always arrive <b>really</b> <u>late</u> . We go there <b>quite</b> <u>often</u> . He's progressing <b>moderately</b> <u>well</u> . The project is going <b>fairly</b> <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
<b>very cold</b>	<b>absolutely freezing</b>
<b>very hot</b>	<b>absolutely boiling</b>
<b>very good</b>	<b>absolutely wonderful, amazing, brilliant, fabulous etc.</b>
<b>very interesting</b>	<b>absolutely fascinating</b>
<b>very hungry</b>	<b>absolutely starving, famished</b>
<b>very attractive</b>	<b>absolutely beautiful, gorgeous etc.</b>
<b>very big</b>	<b>absolutely huge, enormous, gigantic etc.</b>

### 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:

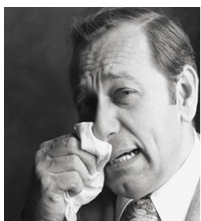
We had **quite** a good time.

We had **rather** a good time.

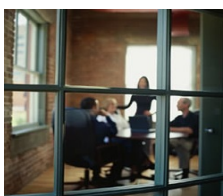
We had a **fairly** good time.

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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