1. **Nouns**

* **What is a noun?**

A noun is a word that names something, such as a person, place, thing, or idea. In a sentence, nouns can play the role of subject, direct object, indirect object, subject complement, object complement, appositive, or adjective.

* **Types of nouns**

Nouns form a large proportion of English vocabulary and they come in a wide variety of types. Nouns can name a person:

E.g. Albert Einstein

the president

my mother

a girl

Nouns can also name a place:

E.g. Mount Vesuvius

Disneyland

my bedroom

Nouns can also name things, although sometimes they might be intangible things, such as concepts, activities, or processes. Some might even be hypothetical or imaginary things.

E.g. shoe

faucet

freedom

The Elder Wand

Basketball

* **Proper nouns / common nouns**

One important distinction to be made is whether a noun is a proper noun or a common noun. A proper noun is a specific name of a person, place, or thing, and is always capitalized.

E.g. Does Tina have much homework to do this evening?

Tina is the name of a specific person.

E.g. I would like to visit Old Faithful.

Old Faithful is the specific name of a geological phenomenon.

The opposite of a proper noun is a common noun, sometimes known as a generic noun. A common noun is the generic name of an item in a class or group and is not capitalized unless appearing at the beginning of a sentence or in a title.

E.g. The girl crossed the river.

Girl is a common noun; we do not learn the identity of the girl by reading this sentence, though we know the action she takes. River is also a common noun in this sentence.

* **Types of common nouns**

Common or generic nouns can be broken down into three subtypes: concrete nouns, abstract nouns, and collective nouns. A concrete noun is something that is perceived by the senses; something that is physical or real.

E.g. I heard the doorbell.

My keyboard is sticky.

Doorbell and keyboard are real things that can be sensed.

Conversely, an abstract noun is something that cannot be perceived by the senses.

E.g. We can’t imagine the courage it took to do that.

Courage is an abstract noun. Courage can’t be seen, heard, or sensed in any other way, but we know it exists.

A collective noun denotes a group or collection of people or things.

E.g. That pack of lies is disgraceful.

Pack of lies as used here is a collective noun. Collective nouns take a singular verb as if they are one entity – in this case, the singular verb is.

E.g. A pride of lions roamed the savanna.

Pride of lions is also a collective noun.

* **Nouns as subjects**

Every sentence must have a subject, and that subject will always be a noun. The subject of a sentence is the person, place, or thing that is doing or being the verb in that sentence.

E.g. Maria is happy.

Maria is the subject of this sentence and the corresponding verb is a form of to be (is).

* **Nouns as objects**

Nouns can also be objects of a verb in a sentence. An object can be either a direct object (a noun that receives the action performed by the subject) or an indirect object (a noun that is the recipient of a direct object).

E.g. Give the books to her.

Books is a direct object (what is being given) and her is the indirect object (who the books are being given to).

* **Nouns as subject and object complements**

Another type of noun use is called a subject complement. In this example, the noun teacher is used as a subject complement.

E.g. Mary is a teacher.

Subject complements normally follow linking verbs like to be, become, or seem. A teacher is what Mary is.

A related usage of nouns is called an object complement.

E.g. I now pronounce you husband and wife.

Husband and wife are nouns used as object complements in this sentence. Verbs that denote making, naming, or creating are often followed by object complements.

* **Appositive nouns and nouns as modifiers**

An appositive noun is a noun that immediately follows another noun in order to further define or identify it.

E.g. My brother, Michael, is six years old.

Michael is an appositive here, further identifying the subject of the sentence, my brother.

Sometimes, nouns can be used adjectivally as well.

E.g. He is a speed demon.

Speed is a normally a noun, but here it is acting as an adjective to modify demon.

* **Plural nouns**

[Plural nouns](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/plural-nouns/), unlike collective nouns, require plural verbs. Many English plural nouns can be formed by adding -s or -es to the singular form, although there are many exceptions.

E.g. cat—cats

These two cats are both black.

Note the plural verb are.

E.g. tax—taxes

house—houses

* **Countable nouns / uncountable nouns**

Countable nouns are nouns which can be counted, even if the number might be extraordinarily high (like counting all the people in the world). Countable nouns can be used with a/an, the, some, any, a few, and many.

E.g. Here is a cat.

Cat is singular and—obviously—countable.

E.g. Here are a few cats.

Here are some cats.

Uncountable nouns are nouns that come in a state or quantity which is impossible to count; liquids are uncountable, as are things that act like liquids (sand, air). They are always considered to be singular, and can be used with some, any, a little, and much.

E.g. An I.Q. test measures intelligence.

Intelligence is an uncountable noun.

E.g. Students don’t seem to have much homework these days.

This example refers to an unspecified, unquantifiable amount of homework, so homework is an uncountable noun.

* **Possessive nouns**

Possessive nouns are nouns which possess something; i.e., they have something. You can identify a possessive noun by the [apostrophe](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/apostrophe/); most nouns show the possessive with an apostrophe and an s.

E.g. The cat’s toy was missing.

The cat possesses the toy, and we denote this by use of ‑’s at the end of cat.

When a singular noun ends in the letter s or z, the same format often applies. This is a matter of style, however, and some style guides suggest leaving off the extra s.

E.g. I have been invited to the boss’s house for dinner.

Mrs. Sanchez’s coat is still hanging on the back of her chair.

Plural nouns ending in s take only an apostrophe to form a possessive.

My nieces’ prom dresses were exquisite.

1. **Adjective**

* **What is an adjective?**

Adjectives are words that describe the qualities or states of being of nouns: enormous, doglike, silly, yellow, fun, fast. They can also describe the quantity of nouns: many, few, millions, eleven.

* **Adjectives modify nouns**

Most students learn that adjectives are words that modify (describe) nouns. Adjectives do not modify verbs or adverbs or other adjectives.

E.g. Margot wore a beautiful hat to the pie-eating contest.

Furry dogs may overheat in the summertime.

My cake should have sixteen candles.

The scariest villain of all time is Darth Vader.

In the sentences above, the adjectives are easy to spot because they come immediately before the nouns they modify.

But adjectives can do more than just modify nouns. They can also act as a complement to linking verbs or the verb to be. A linking verb is a verb like to feel, to seem, or to taste that describes a state of being or a sensory experience.

E.g. That cow sure is happy.

It smells gross in the locker room.

Driving is faster than walking.

The technical term for an adjective used this way is predicate adjective.

* **Uses of adjectives**

Adjectives tell the reader how much—or how many—of something you’re talking about, which thing you want passed to you, or which kind of something you want.

E.g. Please use three white flowers in the arrangement.

Three and white are modifying flowers.

Often, when adjectives are used together, you should separate them with a comma or conjunction. See “Coordinate Adjectives” below for more detail.

E.g. I’m looking for a small, good-tempered dog to keep as a pet.

My new dog is small and good-tempered.

* **Degrees of comparison**

Adjectives come in three forms: absolute, comparative, and superlative. Absolute adjectives describe something in its own right.

E.g. A cool guy

E.g. A messy desk

A mischievous cat

Garrulous squirrels

Comparative adjectives, unsurprisingly, make a comparison between two or more things. For most one-syllable adjectives, the comparative is formed by adding the suffix -er (or just -r if the adjective already ends with an e). For two-syllable adjectives ending in -y, replace -y with -ier. For multi-syllable adjectives, add the word more.

E.g. A cooler guy

A messier desk

A more mischievous cat

More garrulous squirrels

Superlative adjectives indicate that something has the highest degree of the quality in question. One-syllable adjectives become superlatives by adding the suffix -est (or just -st for adjectives that already end in e). Two-syllable adjectives ending in -y replace -y with -iest. Multi-syllable adjectives add the word most. When you use an article with a superlative adjective, it will almost always be the definite article (the) rather than a or an. Using a superlative inherently indicates that you are talking about a specific item or items.

E.g. The coolest guy

The messiest desk

The most mischievous cat

The most garrulous squirrels

* **Coordinate adjectives**

Coordinate adjectives should be separated by a comma or the word and. Adjectives are said to be coordinate if they modify the same noun in a sentence.

E.g. This is going to be a long, cold winter.

Isobel’s dedicated and tireless efforts made all the difference.

But just the fact that two adjectives appear next to each other doesn’t automatically mean they are coordinate. Sometimes, an adjective and a noun form a single semantic unit, which is then modified by another adjective. In this case, the adjectives are not coordinate and should not be separated by a comma.

E.g. My cat, Goober, loves sleeping on this tattered woolen sweater.

No one could open the old silver locket.

In some cases, it’s pretty hard to decide whether two adjectives are coordinate or not. But there are a couple of ways you can test them. Try inserting the word and between the adjectives to see if the phrase still seems natural. In the first sentence, “this tattered and woolen sweater” doesn’t sound right because you really aren’t talking about a sweater that is both tattered and woolen. It’s a woolen sweater that is tattered. Woolen sweater forms a unit of meaning that is modified by tattered.

Another way to test for coordinate adjectives is to try switching the order of the adjectives and seeing if the phrase still works. In the second sentence, you wouldn’t say “No one could open the silver old locket.” You can’t reverse the order of the adjectives because silver locket is a unit that is modified by old.

* **Adjectives vs. adverbs**

As mentioned above, many of us learned in school that adjectives modify nouns and that adverbs modify verbs. But as we’ve seen, adjectives can also act as complements for linking verbs. This leads to a common type of error: incorrectly substituting an adverb in place of a predicate adjective. An example you’ve probably heard before is: I feel badly about what happened.

Because “feel” is a verb, it seems to call for an adverb rather than an adjective. But “feel” isn’t just any verb; it’s a linking verb. An adverb would describe how you perform the action of feeling—an adjective describes what you feel. “I feel badly” means that you are bad at feeling things. If you’re trying to read Braille through thick leather gloves, then it might make sense for you to say “I feel badly.” But if you’re trying to say that you are experiencing negative emotions, “I feel bad” is the phrase you want.

It’s easier to see this distinction with a different linking verb. Consider the difference between these two sentences:

E.g. Goober smells badly.

Goober smells bad.

“Goober smells badly” means that Goober, the poor thing, has a weak sense of smell. “Goober smells bad” means Goober stinks—poor us.

* **When nouns become adjectives and adjectives become nouns**

One more thing you should know about adjectives is that, sometimes, a word that is normally used as a noun can function as an adjective, depending on its placement. For example:

Never try to pet someone’s guide dog without asking permission first.

Guide is a noun. But in this sentence, it modifies dog. It works the other way, too. Some words that are normally adjectives can function as nouns:

E.g. Candice is working on a fundraiser to help the homeless.

In the context of this sentence, homeless is functioning as a noun. It can be hard to wrap your head around this if you think of adjectives and nouns only as particular classes of words. But the terms “adjective” and “noun” aren’t just about a word’s form—they’re also about its function.

* **Adjective usage advice**

We’ll end with a few words about adjectives and style. It’s one thing to know how to use an adjective; it’s another to know when using one is a good idea. Good writing is precise and concise. Sometimes, you need an adjective to convey exactly what you mean. It’s hard to describe a red sports car without the word “red.” But, often, choosing the right noun eliminates the need to tack on an adjective. Is it a big house, or is it a mansion? A large crowd, or a throng? A mixed-breed dog, or a mutt? A dark night, or just . . . night? Always remember to make every word count in your writing. If you need an adjective, use it. But if it’s not pulling its weight, delete it.