



Notice that an adjective is *always* part of a binary system, like a moon circles a planet. The presence of an adjective implies the presence of its noun or pronoun. Every modifier modifies its modified. If you see *the* in a sentence, look for the noun; there has to be the *something*. A noun can do without an adjective, but an adjective cannot exist without a noun or pronoun. If a word is not modifying a noun or pronoun, it is not an adjective.

Three degrees of adjectives: Adjectives have a wonderful property. They can change **degree**. A tree can be tall, taller, or tallest. An insect can be small, smaller, or smallest. Ice cream can be good, better, or best. These three degrees of adjective intensity are known as the **positive** (good), **comparative** (better), and **superlative** (best) degrees. These degrees allow us to make clear comparisons between similar nouns:

positive	comparative	superlative
good	better	best

Proper adjectives: Proper adjectives are made out of proper nouns. *Italy* makes *Italian*. *Sparta* makes *Spartan*. When we convert the proper noun *France* into the proper adjective *French*, we retain the capitalization. *I eat too many French fries*. The reason a school subject such as English or Spanish is capitalized and a subject such as history or mathematics is not capitalized is that *English* and *Spanish* are proper adjectives made from the proper names of countries.

Verbal adjectives: Sometimes we use verb forms as adjectives to modify nouns or pronouns. We might use what we call a **participial** form, such as *running*: *the running water*, or we might use the **infinitive** form of a verb, such as *to read*: *the book to read*. In these cases, the word is an adjective, not a verb, because it performs the adjective function of modifying a noun or pronoun. We identify a word based on its function.

Number adjectives, such as *two* friends or *five* ships, should be written out in academic writing, rather than given as numerals. It is *two* friends, not 2 friends.

The articles— *a, an, and the*— are adjectives.



Articles: The **articles** are the three adjectives *a, an, and the* used to modify nouns. The **definite article** is *the*, and the **indefinite articles** are *a* and *an*. Notice how perfect these names are. We are being definite when we ask for *the* blanket, but we are being indefinite when we ask for *a* blanket. The articles are little noun-alerts; they beep before nouns, letting us know that a noun is coming. The Latin *artus* meant joint; the little articles break sentences into nouny segments, like an insect's jointed leg, each segment beginning with a noun alert.

A centurion walked into **the** arena, waved
to **the** crowd in **the** Colosseum, and bowed to **the** emperor.

Español: In Spanish—and other languages—there are masculine and feminine articles. Every noun is either masculine or feminine and is designated by a masculine definite article, *el*, or a feminine definite article, *la*. So whereas in English we simply say *the book* or *the window*, in Spanish we have to change gender between *el libro* and *la ventana*. The articles also change to agree with nouns' singular and plural number:

the book	el libro
the books	los libros
the window	la ventana
the windows	las ventanas

The feeling of Spanish gender-grammar is poetic, as though all things are alive and animate, rather than being inanimate neutral objects. The English definite article *the* expresses part of an anthropocentric world view that regards humankind as primary, other species as practically inanimate, and other phenomena as inanimate objects.

Good or well? The word *good* is a good adjective that may be used to modify nouns or pronouns well; the word *well* is usually an adverb that modifies verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. *The good violinist plays well.* We should not say “I do not feel well,” which means that one has no talent for feeling things! We should say “I do not feel good,” which uses the adjective *good* to modify the pronoun *I*. *Good students study well.*