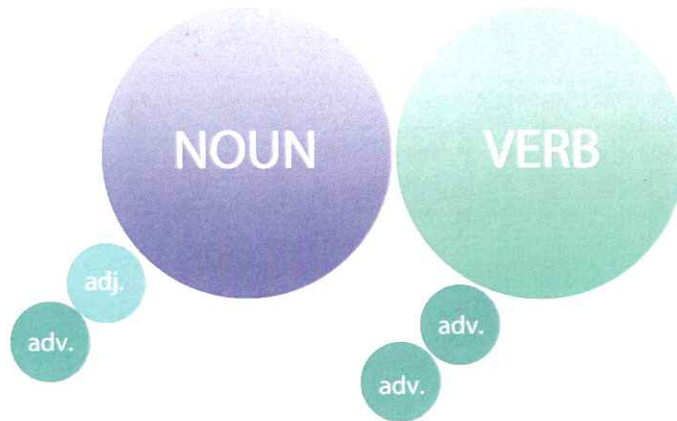




An adverb modifies a verb,
an adjective, or another adverb.

Adverb (adv.): An adverb is a word that modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. Therefore, adverbs modify three kinds of words that adjectives do not modify. *John Silver talked **amiably**. Billy Bones is **too** gaunt. I am hungry, **too**. He and she steer **well**.*

Conjunctive adverbs: The words *however, therefore, furthermore*, and others are conjunctive adverbs; they connect two clauses, but they are primarily adverbial in function.

I think; **therefore I am.**

The Crayola Syndrome: Mark Twain wrote, “If you see an adjective, kill it.” In using modifiers (adjectives and adverbs), you should ask yourself if you are using too many. Though there are wonderful adjectives and adverbs, many are overused and pointless. It is possible that you are using weak modifiers because your vocabulary is weak. Are you saying “really tall” when you mean towering, or are you writing “somewhat scared” when you mean hesitant? Monitor your adjectives and adverbs to make sure you are not using modifiers to compensate for weak nouns. This should not be taken as an endorsement of pompous or stilted language, which is a different way to use words unpleasantly. Look at this weak sentence: “Under the relentless sun, our spirits wilted greatly.” Remove the useless adverb *greatly*, and you get a much stronger sentence that ends with the word *wilted*, which here is cleverly applied to the noun *spirits*. Stephen King made much the same point that Mark Twain made:

The adverb is not your friend.

- Stephen King

Sometimes we hear that we should use many adjectives and adverbs in our sentences because they make sentences rich and flavorful, but most great writers say the opposite because modifiers often make sentences wordy without making them stronger. Modifiers can clog a sentence and obscure the most important words. In their classic book *The Elements of Style*, William Strunk and E.B. White said, “Write with nouns and verbs.”

Very, very, *Very* weak: Sometimes a modifier will backfire, especially when it is overused. One example is the adverb *very*. People use *very* in an effort to intensify adjectives, especially when they sense that the adjective is weak. Unfortunately, the adverb *very* often has the effect of weakening the sentence by filling it with two empty syllables. Omit the *verys*, and let the adjective stand out. Which communicates better: “She was very, very mad” or “She was infuriated”?

Very soon, the very reason: Let us remind ourselves that the word *very* is only an adverb if it is modifying a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. If it is modifying a noun, as in *at the very end of the story*, then *very* is an adjective. The words *adverb* and *adjective* refer to functions; what part of speech a word is depends on what it is doing.

Adverbs in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*: In his 1851 novel *Moby Dick*, about Captain Ahab and the white whale, Herman Melville used adverbs to modify his verbs, giving an expanded sense of action and event. We see adverbs such as *diabolically*, *obstreperously*, *anomalously*, *irrevocably*, *jocularly*, *fain*, *aesthetically*, *palpably*, *vicariously*, *philologically*, *profoundly*, *indolently*, *circumspectly*, *peremptorily*, *obliquely*, *adroitly*, *suffusingly*, *ruefully*, *treacherously*, *intemperately*, *punctiliously*, *impreguably*, *vivaciously*, *sagaciously*, and *ostentatiously*. Do you know all of these adverbs? Which one do you like best?