# The Essentials of English Adjectives:

# 7 Key Adjective Types to Know

“My cat had each of these four adorable kittens.”

If you **removed all the adjectives** from this sentence, what would you be left with?

“Cat had kittens.”

Crazy, isn’t it? We [use adjectives all the time](https://www.fluentu.com/english/blog/english-writing-exercises/), sometimes without even realizing it!

An adjective can add color and life to your sentence, and it can add [important information](https://www.fluentu.com/english/blog/english-intonation/), but that’s not all. Adjectives have many other uses. They can tell you the quantity (how much) and quality (how well) of things, and they can help you [compare two things](https://www.fluentu.com/english/blog/differences-between-american-and-british-english/). In other words, adjectives are wonderful, amazing and fantastic!

Adjectives are used much more often than even native speakers think. They are useful tools for [speaking English well](https://www.fluentu.com/english/blog/english-speaking-online/), so it’s important to learn how to use them correctly.

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## What Is an Adjective?

Adjectives are words that modify (change) nouns, pronouns and other adjectives. In the sentence “he was fast,” the word “fast” is an adjective that describes the pronoun “he.” Here’s a special sentence that uses all the letters of the English language:

“The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.”

In this sentence, the words “quick,” “brown” and “lazy” are adjectives (and so is the word “the,” but we’ll explain this later!). All these words are describing or somehow modifying a noun.

So, you might already know about adjectives like these, like “quick,” “beautiful” and “ugly,” which are used to describe people, places and things.

But did you know that adjectives have many other uses? Words like “every,” “the” and “my” are also adjectives. When you say “my cat,” the word “my” is modifying the word “cat.” It’s describing that cat as your possession, or something that belongs to you. Likewise for the word “every” in the phrase “every cat.”

As you can see, adjectives have many uses!

## The 3 Different Degrees of Adjectives

Imagine changing the temperature on your air conditioner. The air conditioner has different degrees of temperature you can select. Adjectives have different degrees, as well.

The three degrees of an adjective are **positive**, **comparative** and **superlative**. When you use them depends on how many things you’re talking about:

* **A positive adjective** is a normal adjective that’s used to describe, not compare. For example: “This is good soup” and “I am funny.”
* **A comparative adjective** is an adjective that’s used to compare two things (and is often followed by the word than). For example: “This soup is better than that salad” or “I am funnier than her.”
* **A superlative adjective** is an adjective that’s used to compare three or more things, or to state that something is the most. For example: “This is the best soup in the whole world” or “I am the funniest out of all the other bloggers.”

These three degrees only work for **descriptive** adjectives.

If a descriptive adjective has one or two syllables, you can turn it into its comparative and superlative forms by adding -er and -est. For example, you can say that a song is loud, louder (than another song) or the loudest (out of all the other songs).

Descriptive adjectives with three or more syllables don’t use the -er and -est endings. The word beautiful, for example, can’t be turned into beautifuler or beautifulest—those aren’t words! Instead, you add the words more and the most before it to turn it into a comparative or superlative adjective: Beautiful, more beautiful, the most beautiful.

There are some exceptions to these rules, as with most grammar rules. For example, good only has one syllable, but it turns into better and best. You can find a list of common irregular adjectives [here](http://www.edufind.com/english-grammar/comparative-and-superlative/).

Descriptive adjectives are some of the most common, but adjectives have many other uses! Below are the different types of English adjectives you might come across in [your English conversations](https://www.fluentu.com/english/blog/learn-conversational-english/).

To hear them in real-life situations now, you can find them in authentic English videos on **[FluentU](https://www.fluentu.com/english/" \t "_blank)**. FluentU provides real English music videos, movie trailers, inspiring speeches and more, which have been transformed into personalized language lessons.

You can easily search for a word and FluentU will show you videos where the word is used. You’ll also get **interactive subtitles**, flashcards and fun quizzes so you learn English while you watch!

For example, [this video includes lots of descriptive adjectives](https://www.fluentu.com/english/videos/689/drive-by-compliments-2/#dialogue), including some that you’ll encounter in the section below. To watch that video and the full FluentU video library with all the learning features, [sign up for a free FluentU trial](http://fluentu.com/english).

Of course, knowing where to look and how best to start learning adjectives in a shorter timeframe is also a great learning strategy. Who do you know that uses lots of adjectives? Well, characters from novels and stories, of course!

But if you haven’t got the time or level to start learning adjectives with English novels, then no problem. You can watch excellent videos instead!

# 7 Types of English Adjectives That Every ESL Student Must Know

## 1. Descriptive

A **descriptive adjective** is probably what you think of when you hear the word “adjective.” Descriptive adjectives are used to describe nouns and pronouns.

Words like beautiful, cute, silly, tall, annoying, loud and nice are all descriptive adjectives. These adjectives add information and qualities to the words they’re modifying. You can find a list of the 25 most commonly used adjectives at [the English Club](https://www.englishclub.com/vocabulary/common-adjectives-25.htm).

**Examples:**

“The flowers have a smell” is just stating a fact, and it has no adjectives to describe what the flowers or their smell are like.

“The beautiful flowers have a nice smell” gives us a lot more information, with two descriptive adjectives.

You can say “The cat is hungry,” or “The hungry cat.” In both cases, the word hungry is an adjective describing the cat.

## 2. Quantitative

**Quantitative adjectives** describe the quantity of something.

In other words, they answer the question “how much?” or “how many?” Numbers like one and thirty are this type of adjective. So are more general words like many, half and a lot.

**Examples:**

“How many children do you have?” “I only have one daughter.”

“Do you plan on having more kids?” “Oh yes, I want many children!”

“I can’t believe I ate that whole cake!”

## 3. Demonstrative

A **demonstrative adjective** describes “which” noun or pronoun you’re referring to. These adjectives include the words:

* **This** — Used to refer to a singular noun close to you.
* **That** — Used to refer to a singular noun far from you.
* **These** — Used to refer to a plural noun close to you.
* **Those** — Used to refer to a plural noun far from you.

Demonstrative adjectives always come before the word they’re modifying.

Sometimes, like when you’re responding to a question, you can leave off the noun being described and only use the adjective. For example, if someone asks you how many cakes you want to buy you can respond: “I want to buy two cakes,” or you can just say: “I want to buy two.”

**Examples:**

“Which bicycle is yours?” “This bicycle is mine, and that one used to be mine until I sold it.”

## 4. Possessive

**Possessive adjectives** show possession. They describe to whom a thing belongs. Some of the most common possessive adjectives include:

* **My** — Belonging to me
* **His** — Belonging to him
* **Her** — Belonging to her
* **Their** — Belonging to them
* **Your** — Belonging to you
* **Our** — Belonging to us

All these adjectives, except the word his, can only be used before a noun. You can’t just say “That’s my,” you have to say “That’s my pen.” When you want to leave off the noun or pronoun being modified, use these possessive adjectives instead:

* Mine
* His
* Hers
* Theirs
* Yours
* Ours

For example, even though saying “That’s my” is incorrect, saying “That’s mine” is perfectly fine.

**Examples:**

“Whose dog is that?” “He’s mine. That’s my dog.”

## 5. Interrogative

**Interrogative adjectives** interrogate, meaning that they ask a question. These adjectives are always followed by a noun or a pronoun, and are used to form questions. The interrogative adjectives are:

* **Which** — Asks to make a choice between options.
* **What** — Asks to make a choice (in general).
* **Whose** — Asks who something belongs to.

Other question words, like “who” or “how,” aren’t adjectives since they don’t modify nouns. For example, you can say “whose coat is this?” but you can’t say “who coat?”

Which, what and whose are only considered adjectives if they’re immediately followed by a noun. The word which is an adjective in this sentence: “Which color is your favorite?” But not in this one: “Which is your favorite color?”

**Examples:**

“Which song will you play on your wedding day?”

“What pet do you want to get?”

“Whose child is this?”

## 6. Distributive

**Distributive adjectives** describe specific members out of a group. These adjectives are used to single out one or more individual items or people. Some of the most common distributive adjectives include:

* **Each** — Every single one of a group (used to speak about group members individually).
* **Every** — Every single one of a group (used to make generalizations).
* **Either** — One between a choice of two.
* **Neither** — Not one or the other between a choice of two.
* **Any** — One or some things out of any number of choices. This is also used when the choice is irrelevant, like: “it doesn’t matter, I’ll take any of them.”

These adjectives are always followed by the noun or pronoun they’re modifying.

**Examples:**

“[Every rose has its thorn](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcqWyyHlCDA).”

“Which of these two songs do you like?” “I don’t like either song.”

## 7. Articles

There are only three **articles** in the English language: a, an and the. Articles can be difficult for English learners to use correctly because many languages don’t have them (or don’t use them in the same way).

Although articles are their own part of speech, they’re technically also adjectives! Articles are used to describe which noun you’re referring to. Maybe thinking of them as adjectives will help you learn which one to use:

* **A** — A singular, general item.
* **An** — A singular, general item. Use this before words that start with a vowel.
* **The** — A singular or plural, specific item.

Simply put, when you’re talking about something general, use a and an. When you’re speaking about something specific, use the. “A cat” can be used to refer to any cat in the world. “The cat” is used to refer to the cat that just walked by.

Here’s a quick tip that can sometimes help you decide which article to use: Try using a demonstrative adjective before the noun. If it makes sense, use the word the. If it changes the meaning of what you’re trying to say, use a or an.

For example, if it makes sense to say “I don’t understand this question,” you can also say “I don’t understand the question.” On the other hand, it sounds strange to say “I need this tissue” because you don’t need that specific tissue. You just need “a tissue.”

**Examples:**

“The elephants left huge footprints in the sand.”

“An elephant can weigh over 6,000 pounds!”

We hope you’re leaving this article a bit smarter and more educated about the wonders of adjectives!

## And One More Thing…

What’s the key to learning English words and grammar?

Using the right content and tools.

Textbooks are great, but they won’t help you sound like a real English teacher. Plus, traditional studying can get tiring fast.

Well, there is a site designed to help you with all of that: **FluentU**.

[FluentU takes authentic videos like music videos, commercials, news and inspiring talks, and turns them into English learning experiences.](https://www.fluentu.com/english/) You’ll learn English as it’s spoken in real life.