

Adjective Issues for ESL Writers

Adjectives describe nouns or noun phrases. They are almost always placed in this order:

1. **Number**
2. **Evaluation**
3. **Physical Description (size, shape, age, color)**
4. **Classifying Adjectives**

Rule One: The adjectives are placed before the noun if sentence does not use a “to be” verb to define the noun.

Two rules dictate adjective use in Standard English:

The sixteen durable oblong rods undergird the bridge section.
Number Evaluation Shape Subject

Rule Two: The adjectives are placed after the noun if a “to be” verb is used to define the noun.

The mixture is toxic and hazardous.
Evaluation Class

The road was long, flat, and two-lane.
Shape Shape Class

Only put a comma between adjectives if they are *coordinate adjectives*. *Coordinate adjectives* have the same status in a sentence, as in the following examples:

He was a *difficult, stubborn* child.

The *quick, efficient* roadwork helped the city a lot.

The crew used *meticulous, precise* measurements to complete the work.

To find out if adjectives are coordinate, ask the following questions:

- 1) **Does the sentence make sense if the adjectives are reversed?**
- 2) **Does the sentence make sense if ‘and’ is written between them?**

If the answer to these questions is yes, separate the adjectives with a comma.

Order the words in parenthesis to create a sentence with appropriate adjective order. Ask the 'coordinate adjective' questions to determine if you need a comma between adjectives.

- 1) The saw cuts were (*clean deep straight*).
- 2) The team of (*Lebanese chemical well-renowned*) engineers visited campus.
- 3) The (*pavement control group unhardened*) mixture was used for the final experiment.
- 4) The (*graduate industrious intelligent*) student worked hard in the class.