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**

Two rules dictate adjective use in Standard English:

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

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

*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:*

- The sixteen **durable** **oblong** rods undergird the bridge section.
- The mixture is **toxic** and **hazardous**.
- The road was **long**, **flat**, and **two-lane**.
- 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.
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.