

Word order: position of adjectives

Different kinds of words go in different positions in a sentence. For example, nouns usually go at the beginning of a sentence. Adjectives usually go before nouns. They can also go after verbs. Nouns, too, can go after verbs. The main factor that determines the position of a word is its function. For example, a noun used as the subject of the verb has to go at the beginning of the sentence. A noun used as the object of a verb can only go after the verb. As the placement of words can significantly affect the meaning of a sentence it is important to learn the rules regarding the position of words. Here is a basic guide to word order in English.

Adjectives

Adjectives usually go before the nouns they modify.

Susie is a beautiful girl. (Here the adjective beautiful goes immediately before the noun (girl) it modifies.)

More examples are given below.

We met an interesting man.

That was a wonderful experience.

She is a great woman.

Note that we cannot put another word between an adjective and the noun it modifies.

However, we can use any number of adjectives to modify the same noun.

She married a tall, dark, handsome man.

When more than one adjective modify the same noun, we usually separate them using a comma. No commas are used to separate the last adjective in the series from the noun it modifies.

Adjectives can also go after linking verbs. Note that the most common linking verbs in English are: is, am, are, was, were, become, seem, appear, taste, feel, grow and turn.

When adjectives go after linking verbs, they usually describe the subject.

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Susie is beautiful. (Here the adjective beautiful describes the noun Susie.)

The fish tasted funny. (Here the adjective funny describes the taste of the fish.)

The night grew dark.

The milk turned sour.

I felt awful.