

THE GRAMMAR GUIDEBOOK

ARTICLE ADJ ADJ N PREP OBJ OF PREP PRES PART (ADJ) N (PL)
A Complete Reference Tool for Young Writers, Aspiring Rhetoricians,
CONJ INDEF PRO RELATIVE PRO V (ACT) INFIN (AS N, DO) ADV N (PROPER) V (ACT)
and Anyone Else Who Needs to Understand How English Works

BY SUSAN WISE BAUER



THE GRAMMAR GUIDEBOOK:

**A COMPLETE REFERENCE TOOL FOR YOUNG WRITERS,
ASPIRING RHETORICIANS, AND ANYONE ELSE WHO
NEEDS TO UNDERSTAND HOW ENGLISH WORKS**

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PARTS OF SPEECH

“Part of speech” is a term that explains what a word does.

NOUNS

Types of nouns

A noun names a person, place, thing, or idea.

Concrete nouns can be observed with our senses.

shrimp tree gold

Abstract nouns cannot.

delight victory pride

A common noun is a name common to many persons, places, things, or ideas.

planet

A proper noun is the special, particular name for a person, place, thing, or idea. Proper nouns always begin with capital letters.

Mars

A collective noun names a group of people, animals, or things.

family orchestra constellation

A compound noun is a single noun composed of two or more words.

One word:	shipwreck, haircut, chalkboard
Hyphenated word:	self-confidence, check-in, pinch-hitter
Two or more words:	air conditioning, North Dakota, <i>The Prince and the Pauper</i>

Capitalization rules

1. Capitalize the proper names of persons, places, things, and animals.

Gandalf Alderaan Honda Lassie

2. Capitalize the names of holidays.

New Year's Day

3. Capitalize the names of deities.

Zeus

God

Allah

Great Spirit

4. Capitalize the days of the week and the months of the year, but not the seasons.

Tuesday

January

winter

5. Capitalize the first, last, and other important words in titles of books, magazines, newspapers, stories, poems, and songs. Italicize the titles of books, magazines, and newspapers. Put the titles of stories, poems, and songs into quotation marks.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

"Casey At the Bat"

6. Capitalize and italicize the first, last, and other important words in the names of ships, trains, and planes.

Titanic

The Orient Express

The Spirit of St. Louis

Gender

Nouns have gender.

Nouns can be masculine, feminine, or neuter.

We use "neuter" for nouns that have no gender, or for nouns whose gender is unknown.

masculine	bull
feminine	cow
neuter	calf

Plural formation**1. Usually, add -s to a noun to form the plural.**

desk

desks

2. Add -es to nouns ending in -s, -sh, -ch, -x, or -z.

mess

messes

3. If a noun ends in -y after a consonant, change the y to i and add -es.

family

families

4. If a noun ends in -y after a vowel, just add -s.

toy toys

5. Words ending in -f, -fe, or -ff form their plurals differently.**5a. For words that end in -f or -fe, change the f or fe to v and add -es.**

leaf leaves

5b. For words that end in -ff, simply add -s.

sheriff sheriffs

5c. Some words that end in a single -f can form their plurals either way.

scarf scarfs
 scarves

6. If a noun ends in -o after a vowel, just add -s.

patio patios

7. If a noun ends in -o after a consonant, form the plural by adding -es.

potato potatoes

8. To form the plural of foreign words ending in -o, just add -s.

piano pianos

9. Irregular plurals don't follow any of these rules.

child children
foot feet
mouse mice
fish fish

10. Compound nouns are pluralized in different ways.**10a. If a compound noun is made up of one noun along with another word or words, pluralize the noun.**

brother-in-law brothers-in-law

10b. If a compound noun ends in -ful, pluralize by putting an -s at the end of the entire word.

truckful truckfuls

10c. If neither element of the compound noun is a noun, pluralize the entire word.

grown-up grown-ups

10d. If the compound noun includes more than one noun, choose the most important to pluralize.

secretary of state

secretaries of state

Noun “imposters”

A gerund is a present participle acting as a noun.

gerund (object of the preposition)

I have never developed indigestion from **eating** my words.

Winston Churchill

A noun clause takes the place of a noun. Noun clauses can be introduced by relative pronouns, relative adverbs, or subordinating conjunctions. See “noun clauses,” p. 58.

noun clause serving as direct object

How do the Wise know **that this ring is his**?

J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Nouns that can serve as other parts of speech

Numbers can serve as either nouns or adjectives.

Cardinal numbers represent quantities (one, two, three, four . . .). They can be either nouns or adjectives.

noun

One of these papers was a letter to this girl Agnes, and the other a will.

adjective

The housebreaker freed **one** arm, and grasped his pistol.

Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*

Ordinal numbers represent order (first, second, third, fourth . . .). They can be either nouns or adjectives.

Then, at a grocer’s shop, we bought an egg and a slice of streaky bacon;

noun

which still left what I thought a good deal of change, out of the **second** of the bright shillings, and made me consider London a very cheap place.

adjective

My mother had a sure foreboding at the **second** glance, that it was Miss Betsey.

Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*

An adverbial noun tells the time or place of an action, or explains how long, how far, how deep, how thick, or how much. It can modify a verb,

adjective or adverb. An adverbial noun plus its modifiers is an adverbial noun phrase.

The manure should be cleaned out **morning, noon**, and again at night.
 “The Horse and His Treatment”

ADJECTIVES

An adjective modifies a noun or pronoun.

Adjectives tell what kind, which one, how many, and whose.

An adjective that comes right before the noun it modifies is in the *attributive position*.

An adjective that follows the noun is in the *predicative position*.

Descriptive adjectives tell what kind.

A descriptive adjective becomes an abstract noun when you add *-ness* to it.

The past participle of a verb can act as a descriptive adjective.

The present participle of a verb can act as a descriptive adjective.

descriptive
attributive position

The cold within him froze his **old** features, nipped his pointed nose,

descriptive
predicative position

shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes **red**, his thin lips

descriptive
predicative position

descriptive
present participle

blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his **grating** voice.

descriptive adjective

descriptive adjective
past participle

Quiet and **dark**, beside him stood the Phantom, with its **outstretched** hand.

abstract noun

Darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it.

Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*

Articles modify nouns and answer the question “which one.”

The articles are a, an, and the.

Use *a* to modify a nonspecific noun that begins with a consonant and *an* to modify a nonspecific noun that begins with a vowel. Use *the* to modify specific nouns.

Go on in **the** house and wash up, Gabe . . . I’ll fix you **a** sandwich.

You’re **a** day late and **a** dollar short when it comes to **an** understanding with me.

August Wilson, *Fences*

Demonstrative adjectives modify nouns and answer the question “which one.”

this, that, these, those

Demonstrative pronouns demonstrate or point out something. They take the place of a single word or a group of words.

demonstrative pronoun

These are the seven entrances to the home under the ground, for which
demonstrative adjective

Hook has been searching in vain **these** many moons.

J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*

Indefinite adjectives modify nouns and answer the questions “which one” and “how many.”

Singular indefinite adjectives:

another other one

either neither each

Plural indefinite adjectives:

both few many several

Singular or plural indefinite adjectives:

all any most no some enough much

singular indefinite adjective modifies singular noun “attention”

I do not think that nearly **enough** attention is being given to the possibility of another attack from the Martians.

H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*

This violates a basic principle of numbers called the axiom of

plural indefinite adjective modifies plural noun “times”

Archimedes, which says that if you add something to itself **enough** times, it will exceed any other number in magnitude.

Charles Seife, *Zero: The Biography of a Dangerous Idea*

indefinite pronoun acting as direct object

On the day before Thanksgiving she would have just **enough** to pay the remaining \$4.

O. Henry, “The Purple Dress”

Interrogative adjectives modify nouns and answer the questions “which one” and “how many.”

who, whom, whose, what, which

Interrogative pronouns take the place of nouns in questions.

The interrogative words **who, whom, whose, what, and which** can also serve as relative pronouns in adjective clauses or introductory words in noun clauses.

interrogative adjective (modifies “sort”)

What sort of place had I come to, and among **what** kind of people?

interrogative pronoun (direct object of “could do”)

What could I do but bow acceptance?

introductory word in noun clause
(clause is direct object of “know”)

Do you know where you are going, and **what** you are going to?

Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

Possessive adjectives tell whose.

An apostrophe is a punctuation mark that shows possession. It turns a noun into an adjective that tells whose [possessive adjective].

Form the possessive of a singular noun by adding an apostrophe and the letter *s*.

Rurik’s

goose’s

airplane’s

Form the possessive of a plural noun ending in *-s* by adding an apostrophe only.

girls’

chickens’

airplanes’

Form the possessive of a plural noun that does not end in *-s* as if it were a singular noun.

men’s

geese’s

Possessive personal pronouns show possession and act as adjectives.

my, mine, our, ours, your, yours, his, her, hers, its, their, theirs

<i>Attributive Form</i>	<i>Predicative Form</i>
my	mine
your	yours
his, her, its	his, hers, its
our	ours
your	yours
their	theirs

possessive personal pronouns
predicative form

“The Last Doll, indeed!” said Miss Minchin. “And she is **mine**, not **yours**.”

possessive personal pronoun
attributive form

“No,” said Sara, laughing. “It was **my** rat.”

possessive personal pronoun
attributive form

It’s a good thing not to answer **your** enemies.

Francis Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess*

Appositive adjectives directly follow the word they modify.

It was a spot **remote, sequestered, cloistered** from the business and pleasures of the world.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Alice: The Mysteries*

A proper adjective is formed from a proper name. Proper adjectives are capitalized.

He arrived at the Old Vic determined to do away with the old-fashioned actor-manager type of **Shakespearean** production that dated from the **Victorian** era.

Piers Paul Read, *Alec Guinness: The Authorised Biography*

Words that are not usually capitalized remain lower-case even when they are attached to a proper adjective.

The *Mayflower* carried the **anti-Christmas** sentiment of the Puritans with it across the Atlantic, so the holiday took a long time to take hold in the New World.

Michael Judge, *The Dance of Time*

A compound adjective combines two words into a single adjective with a single meaning.

Compound adjectives answer the questions “what kind” and “how many.”

Hyphens connect compound adjectives in the attributive position.

Compound adjectives in the predicative position are not usually hyphenated.

It is the natural order of things for virtuous men to create a faction with other virtuous men because they share the same way, and for **narrow-minded** men to create factions with other **narrow-minded** men because of gain.

Ouyang Xiu

Pih-e was **narrow minded**, and Lew-hea Hwuy was deficient in gravity; therefore, the superior man follows neither of them.

Mencius

A predicate adjective describes the subject and is found in the complete predicate.

All emotions, and that one particularly, were **abhorrent** to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind.

A. Conan Doyle, "A Scandal in Bohemia"

The positive degree of an adjective describes only one thing.

It is a **good** thing.

The comparative degree of an adjective compares two things.

It is a far, far **better** thing that I do, than I have ever done.

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

The superlative degree of an adjective compares three or more things.

It was the **best** of times, it was the **worst** of times.

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

Spelling Rules for Forming Comparatives and Superlatives

Most regular adjectives form the comparative by adding -r or -er.

Most regular adjectives form the superlative by adding -st or -est.

If the adjective ends in -e already, add only -r or -st.

noble	nobler	noblest
-------	--------	---------

If the adjective ends in a short vowel sound and a consonant, double the consonant and add -er or -est.

red	redder	reddest
-----	--------	---------

If the adjective ends in -y, change the y to i and add -er or -est.

hazy	hazier	haziest
------	--------	---------

Many adjectives form their comparative and superlative forms by adding the word *more* or *most* before the adjective instead of using -er or -est.

unusual	more unusual	most unusual
---------	--------------	--------------

In comparative and superlative adjective forms, the words *more* and *most* are used as adverbs.

Irregular adjectives form the comparative and superlative by changing form.

good	better	best
bad	worse	worst

Do not use *more* with an adjective or adverb that is already in the comparative form.

He is ~~more~~ hungrier than you are.

Do not use *most* with an adjective or adverb that is already in the superlative form.

That's the ~~most~~ reddest sunset I've ever seen.

Use an adjective form when an adjective is needed and an adverb form when an adverb is needed.

superlative adjective modifying the noun "time"

The steps must be taken in the **quickest** time.
Irving Brokaw, *The Art of Skating*

superlative adverb
modifying "can be adjusted"

The skater will quickly find out for himself how the straps
can be **most quickly** and comfortably adjusted.
T. Maxwell Witham, *Figure-Skating*

An adjective clause is a dependent clause that acts as an adjective in a sentence, modifying a noun or pronoun in the independent clause.

Relative pronouns introduce adjective clauses and refer back to an antecedent in the independent clause.

who, whom, whose, which, that.

relative pronoun refers back to antecedent "order"

Speak to me of the religious order **whose chief you are**.
Alexandre Dumas, *The Man in the Iron Mask*

Who always acts as a subject or predicate nominative within a sentence or clause. Whom always acts as an object.

subject of the underlined adjective clause

It was Phileas Fogg, whose head now emerged from behind
his newspapers, **who made this remark**.

object of
the preposition

direct object of the
underlined adjective clause

You forget that it is I with **whom** you have to deal, sir; for it
was I **whom you not only insulted, but struck!**
Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days*

The interrogative words who, whom, whose, what, and which can also serve as relative pronouns in adjective clauses or introductory words in noun clauses.

noun clause
acting as subject

noun clause acting as appositive adjective clause with relative pronoun (“it” is antecedent)

What was it—I paused to think—**what** was it **that** so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher?

Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*

Adjective clauses can be introduced by prepositions.

They were coming to a thicket of juniper and dog roses, tangled at
 adjective clause introduced by preposition “on” modifies “trails”
 ground level with nettles and trails of bryony **on which the berries**
were now beginning to ripen and turn red.

Richard Adams, *Watership Down*

Adjective clauses should usually go immediately before or after the noun or pronoun they modify.

 correct placement (bolded clause modifies “truck”)
 He stumbled his way to the truck **that was parked at an angle** near
 the tall, flashing neon sign.

Mark Rashid, *Out of the Wild*

A restrictive modifying clause defines the word that it modifies. Removing the clause changes the essential meaning of the sentence.

A nonrestrictive modifying clause describes the word that it modifies. Removing the clause doesn’t change the essential meaning of the sentence.

Only nonrestrictive clauses should be set off by commas.

 restrictive adjective clause
 The elaborate machinery **which was once used to make men**
responsible is now used solely in order to shift the responsibility.

 nonrestrictive adjective clause
 This idea, **which is the core of ethics**, is the core of the nursery-tales.
 G. K. Chesterton, *All Things Considered*

Traditionally, when the relative pronoun introducing a modifying clause refers to a thing rather than a person, “which” introduces nonrestrictive clauses and “that” introduces restrictive clauses. (This rule is no longer universally observed; see the examples above)

 nonrestrictive
 The feast of Tara was held, **at which all were gathered together.**

 restrictive
 She was singing lullabies to a cat **that was yelping on her shoulder.**
 James Stephens, *Irish Fairy Tales*

Descriptive adjectives *describe* by giving additional details.

Limiting adjectives *define* by setting limits.

Descriptive Adjectives

Regular
Present participles
Past participles

Limiting Adjectives

Possessives
Articles
Demonstratives
Indefinites
Interrogatives
Numbers

Cardinal numbers represent quantities (one, two, three, four . . .). They can be either nouns or adjectives.

Ordinal numbers represent order (first, second, third, fourth . . .). They can be either nouns or adjectives.

See nouns, p. 4.

Use “fewer” for concrete items and “less” for abstractions.

concrete

Her attainments were **fewer** than were usually possessed by girls of her age and station.

Charlotte Bronte, *Shirley*

abstract

With little ceremony, and **less** courtesy, he pointed out what he termed her errors.

Charlotte Bronte, *Villette*

A misplaced modifier is an adjective, adjective phrase, adverb, or adverb phrase in the wrong place.

INCORRECT: Lost: A cow belonging to an old woman **with brass knobs on her horns**.

CORRECT: Lost: A cow **with brass knobs on her horns**, belonging to an old woman.

A squinting modifier can belong either to the sentence element preceding or the element following.

INCORRECT: Children who watch TV **rarely** turn out to be readers.

CORRECT: Children who **rarely** watch TV turn out to be readers.

CORRECT: **Rarely**, children who watch TV turn out to be readers.

A dangling modifier has no noun or verb to modify.

INCORRECT: **Tearing open the envelope**, a thick wad of bills fell out.

CORRECT: Tearing open the envelope, the blackmailer found a thick wad of bills.

CORRECT: As the blackmailer tore open the envelope, a thick wad of bills fell out.

Comparisons can be formed using a combination of *more* and *fewer* or *less*; a combination of *more* and *more or fewer/less* and *fewer/less*; a combination of *more* or *fewer/less* with a comparative form; or simply two comparative forms.

In comparisons using *more . . . fewer* and *more . . . less*, *more* and *less* can act as either adverbs or adjectives and *the* can act as an adverb.

adjective

He would do very well if he had **fewer** cakes and sweetmeats sent him from home.

adverb

I wanted to tease you a little to make you **less** sad.

Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*

When *than* is used in a comparison and introduces a clause with understood elements, it is acting as a subordinating conjunction.

He gave one the idea that he had been active **rather than** [that he had been] strong; his shoulders were not broad for his height, though certainly not narrow.

Charles Darwin, *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*

***More than* and *less than* are compound modifiers.**

compound adverb

How much **more than** delightful to go to some good concert or fine opera.

Charles Darwin, *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*

An adjective of negation (*no*) states what is not true or does not exist.

Do not use two adverbs or adjectives of negation together.

INCORRECT: I haven't heard **no** good of such folk.

CORRECT: I have heard **no** good of such folk.

CORRECT: I haven't heard good of such folk.

PRONOUNS

A pronoun takes the place of a noun.

The antecedent is the noun that is replaced by the pronoun.

pronoun without
antecedent

pronoun replacing
antecedent “driver”

The driver saw **it** at the same moment; **he** at once checked the horses,
and, jumping to the ground, disappeared into the darkness.
Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

Personal Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
First person:	I, me, my, mine	we, us, our, ours
Second person:	you, your, yours	you, your, yours
Third person:	he, she, it, him, her, his, hers, its	they, them, their, theirs

Object personal pronouns are used as objects in sentences.

me, you, him, her, it, us, them

Subject personal pronouns are used as subjects and predicate
nominatives in sentences.

I, you, he, she, it, we, they

subject of
adjective clause

subject of
sentence

Wondering what bargain **we** had made, **I** turned to the class for an
object of preposition
answer, but the class looked back at **me** in puzzlement.
Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Possessive personal pronouns show possession and act as adjectives.

my, mine, our, ours, your, yours, his, hers, its, their, theirs

See *possessive adjectives*, p. 7

Indefinite pronouns are pronouns without antecedents.

Singular:

anybody	anyone	anything
everybody	everyone	everything
nobody	no one	nothing
somebody	someone	something
another	other	one
either	neither	each

Plural:

both	few	many	several
------	-----	------	---------

Singular or Plural:

all	any	most	none	some
-----	-----	------	------	------