Adverbs (and adverbials)

Adverbs are the most mixed of all the parts of speech. By definition, an adverb is a word (or, phrase) that modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb, but this loose definition lets in all sorts of words with functions and meanings that are quite different from one another.

Terminology: adverb versus adverbial. In this sentence, the word quickly is termed an adverb because it functions adverbially, that is, it is an adverb because it modifies a verb.

He ran quickly.

In this case, because the part of speech for quickly is an adverb, it is hardly necessary to also label it as adverbial; all adverbs are, of course, adverbial.

The term adverbial, however, does become useful when it is used to refer to a word or phrase that is not formally an adverb but that is behaving adverbially. In each of the three examples, the sentence begins with an adverbial. Each of the italicized units has an obviously adverbial function; each modifies the verb of the main sentence.

Yesterday, he fell asleep.

In the morning, he fell asleep.

When he finished reading, he fell asleep.
In the first sentence, the adverbial is the single word *yesterday*, in the second the adverbial is the prepositional phrase *in the morning*, and in the third, the adverbial is the clause *When he finished reading*. Notice that despite the differences in their own structures, the relationship of each of the three to the verb *fell* is basically the same.

Adverbs are adverbs because they serve an adverbial function. Sometimes it is a prepositional phrase functioning adverbially—for example, *in the morning*, sometimes it is a one-word adverb functioning adverbially—for example, *quickly*, and sometimes it is what looks suspiciously like a noun functioning adverbially—for example, *mornings*. ¹ Certainly with adverbs, it is more their function than their form that makes them adverbs.

**Adverb types**

Adverbs can be classified in many ways, but one simple way is to classify them according to the elements that they modify. Here, adverbs will be divided into *adjuncts*—those adverbs that form an integral part of the clause they occur in, *conjuncts*—those adverbs that help join the clause they occur in to another clause, and *disjuncts*—those adverbs that neither form an integral part of the clause they occur in nor help join their own clause to another clause elsewhere, but instead express a parenthetical opinion of the speaker.

**I. Adjuncts**

Adjuncts are an integral part of their own clause, and, in many ways, adjuncts are what we most typically think of when we hear the term adverb. These adverbs can either modify the verb or they can modify adjectives and other adverbs.

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¹ *Mornings*, in a sentence such as *Shirley works mornings* look very like a noun acting adverbially. The presence of the plural marker *-s* on the end of *mornings* certainly makes this look like a noun, but it is equally clear that *mornings* is functioning adverbially in the sentence as a whole. Traditionally it would be analyzed as an adverb in the more simplified analyses; in more sophisticated traditional analyses, it would be analyzed as a noun functioning adverbially.
Adverbs showing time, place, manner, and so on

Adverbs of place, manner, frequency, and time are supposed to occur in that order, although the actual order is subject to so many variables that the sequence is violated as often as it is followed. In any case, the adverbs themselves may, of course, be as small as a single word or as large as a clause, but quite frequently are prepositional phrases used adverbially.

Adverbs of place tell the place or the direction of the action: here, away, outside, left, straight, east, at the corner.

Adverbs of manner describe how the action of the verb occurred: quickly, neatly, abruptly, powerfully, with a start, and so on. Such adverbs are often made from an adjective by adding an -ly ending. This group of adverbs may also express the instrument used (with a fork), the agent involved (by a hired killer), or any of several other nuances of manner.

Adverbs of frequency express something about the frequency of the event described in the verb: often, never, every year or two, always, sometimes, randomly, and so on.

Adverbs of time express the time of the event given in the verb: yesterday, today, recently, soon, in a year or two, and so on.

Intensifiers (expressing degree)

Intensifiers occur directly before the adverb or adjective they modify, usually expressing some sort of degree: frequently late, very strong, pretty stupid, rather ugly, extremely short-sighted, somewhat confused, a little shaken, a somewhat light green color, and so on. Notice that intensifiers can modify both adjectives and other adverbs.

In addition, the too...to... construction and the more...than... construction are also sometimes included in this group.
**Too...to... versus very: a digression**

The *too...to...* construction is discussed here in some detail primarily because it has remained a consistent teaching problem over the years.

As a general principle, it is a mistake to teach things together that one wants to keep separate. Often the only result of such teaching is that items that might otherwise not be connected with each other become thoroughly confused. However, with *too...to...* versus *very*, often the damage has already been done; my students come with these distinctions quite thoroughly intermixed.

The distinction can be taught with examples very carefully selected to illustrate the crucial difference between the two meanings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Am I very tall?</em></th>
<th><em>No.</em></th>
<th><em>Am I very short?</em></th>
<th><em>No.</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Can I walk under the table?</em></td>
<td><em>Why not? I'm too tall.</em></td>
<td><em>Can I touch the ceiling?</em></td>
<td><em>Why not? I'm too short.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Am I very heavy?</em></td>
<td><em>No.</em></td>
<td><em>Am I very old?</em></td>
<td><em>No.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Can I stand on a coffee cup without breaking it?</em></td>
<td><em>Why not? I'm too heavy.</em></td>
<td><em>Can I go to elementary school?</em></td>
<td><em>Why not? I'm too old.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Am I very young?</em></td>
<td><em>No.</em></td>
<td><em>Can I retire?</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Why not? I'm too young.</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That is,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>I am not very tall,</em></th>
<th><em>I am not very short,</em></th>
<th><em>I am not very heavy,</em></th>
<th><em>I am not very old,</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>but I am too tall to...</em></td>
<td><em>but I am too short to...</em></td>
<td><em>but I am too heavy to...</em></td>
<td><em>but I am too old to...</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The trick in the selection of examples is to show a contrast in which someone is not tall but too tall, not heavy but too heavy, not short but too short, not old but too old, not young but too young, and so on.

**Focussing adjuncts: only, even, just…**

Focussing adjuncts indicate either *restrictive* or *additive*. If the adjunct is restrictive, the adjunct indicates that what is being said is being limited to a particular case; for instance, the *only* in *Only Jim managed to finish his project on time* restricts the reference to *Jim*.

*Only* he managed to finish his project on time.
Peter was *only* thinking out loud, but Sharon got upset.
Bill *only* kissed Suzanne.
Jerry went to the theater *only* because of his wife.
Jerry went to the theater *only* because his wife asked him to.

*Just* Gabi was actually able to figure out the solution.
Why did you hit him? *He was just* asking the time.

The selection will be made *solely* on the basis of the test.
The winner is Sidney, *not* Bertha.

If the adjunct is additive, the adjunct indicates that what is being said is being extended to an additional case; for instance, the *even* in *Even Jim managed to finish his project on time* adds *Jim* to the group that finished their projects on time.

*Even* Jim managed to finish his project on time.
This week Bill *even* did the assigned readings.

Ela, *in particular*, was unhappy with the constant delays.
We did some work *as well*.

Colonel Mustard, *likewise*, has taken the Fifth.
If focussing adjuncts were only found modifying nouns, it would make sense to analyze them as adjectival, but since they occur modifying a whole range of constructions—nouns, pronouns, prepositional phrases and subordinate clauses, they are analyzed as focussing adjuncts, a type of adverbial. One thing that makes this group particularly interesting is that, as can be seen from the examples, their placement affects meaning.

**EXERCISE 10.1: TYPES OF ADJUNCTS.**

Identify the type of the adverb(s) italicized in each of the sentences.

1. Serena *even* took a bath *this month.*
   __________________    __________________

2. The huge stone *eventually* moved but *somewhat slowly.*
   ________________   _______________     _______________

3. *In the morning,* the rustlers *reluctantly* started moving *east.*
   ________________   ________________   ______________

4. *Sometimes* the answer comes *quite quickly,* sometimes not.
   ________________   ________________   ______________

5. The old man walked *extremely fast.*
   __________________    __________________

**EXERCISE 10.2: TYPES OF ADJUNCTS.**

Identify the type of the adverb(s) italicized in each of the sentences.

1. Serena *usually* washes *reluctantly* and *infrequently.*
   __________________    __________________    ______________

2. *By morning,* the issues had *slowly* become *somewhat* clearer.
   __________________    __________________    __________________
3. *Right here* was where the fight was going to be.

4. *Quite often* I am *completely* wrong.

5. The old man kicked the mugger *fast, hard,* and *accurately.*

II. Conjuncts

**Sentence compounding: correlative conjunctions, and conjunctive adverbs**

In English, there are four ways in which sentences (clauses) may be joined together: through the use of the so-called *co-ordinating conjunctions,* through the use of *correlative conjunctions,* through the use of *conjunctive adverbs,* or through the use of *semi-colons (:).*

The **co-ordinating conjunctions** include *and,* *but,* *nor,* and *or.* These are called co-ordinating because they join two syntactically independent clauses. However, even though the two clauses are both independent syntactically, semantically one clause is usually semantically subordinate to the other. These conjunctions may join words, phrases, or sentences.

The **correlative conjunctions,** much like the co-ordinating conjunctions, join two (or more) syntactically equivalent units, for example, they might join two noun phrases or two embedded clauses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Bill's stealing</th>
<th>nor</th>
<th>his drinking…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Both</em></td>
<td>the old man</td>
<td><em>and</em></td>
<td>his aging dog…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Either</em></td>
<td>one of you</td>
<td><em>or</em></td>
<td>someone else…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>both</em></td>
<td>Marie</td>
<td><em>and</em></td>
<td>Jakub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>neither</em></td>
<td>the sleeping child</td>
<td><em>nor</em></td>
<td>the nervous mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>either</em></td>
<td>you</td>
<td><em>or</em></td>
<td>Jake</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is a tendency in both speaking and in writing to make the units joined by correlative con-
junctions parallel (see Chapter 16 for a discussion of parallelism).

The **conjunctive adverbs** include *however, although, when, thus, before, therefore,* and *after*.¹

**Although** she usually danced well, she **tripped** this time.

*adverbial clause*           *verb*

**Before** Bill finished drinking, he **passed out**.

*adverbial clause*           *verb*

They are called *conjunctive* because they join one clause to another, and they are called *adver-
bial* because the clause functions in an adverbial relationship to the verb in the main sentence.

Note: An alternative label for this last group of words is *subordinating* conjunctions. Again, the
terminology is transparent: They are called conjunctions because they join one clause to
another, and they are called subordinate because the clause they are part of is subordinate to the
main clause in the sentence. Neither labelling system is right or wrong; it is more a case of a
slightly different way of labelling what is obviously the same relationship.

**III. Disjuncts**

Disjuncts are, as the name implies, unconnected either with their own clause or with
other clauses, and, thus, can move freely to different places in the sentence. Disjuncts express
the opinion of the speaker (or writer) about the content of the sentence.

This answer, *in my opinion*, is absolutely brilliant.
Simon's answer, *unfortunately*, is not as brilliant.
*To be honest*, I never did like the way he does things.

¹. This, however, is not to say that these words occur only as conjunctive adverbs. They can and do occur as
other parts of speech, too. Conjunctive adverbs are described in much greater detail in the chapter on transi-
tions.
Since disjuncts are not part of the meaning of the main sentence, they are often separated from the rest of the sentence by commas.

**Adverbs and subject-verb inversion**

When certain adverbs occur at the beginning of a sentence, the position of the subject and the verb are reversed.

- Seldom had he ever said anything nice.
- Never have so many taken so long to say so little.
- Scarcely had Jill entered the office, when trouble started.

Usually these adverbs have a negative meaning.

- Another similar group that involves the reversal of the normal position of the subject and verb includes *only, so ..., and such a ....*

- Only twice was he late in fourteen years of service.
- Such a brilliant woman was she that few dared oppose her.
- So thorough was her preparation that no problems arose.

Yet another group involves putting an adverb of place at the front of a sentence and then reversing the normal order of subject and verb.

- Here comes the judge.
- Inside the small cave were four people huddled together.
- Among the guests were a Senator and two Congressmen.
- There sat Professor Samuels eating his lunch.

This last pattern is used to introduce something new onto the scene.
EXERCISE 10.3: TYPES OF ADVERBS.

Identify the type of adverb(s) italicized in each of the sentences as either a conjunct, a disjunct, or an adjunct. If it is an adjunct, also identify the kind of adjunct.

1. According to Jim, Bob often solves the problems quickly.
   _______________ _______________ ______________

2. The huge stone, in my opinion, can be moved but only somewhat slowly.
   _______________ _______________ ______________

3. As a consequence, the rustlers reluctantly started moving east.
   _______________ _______________ ______________

4. When the answer comes, it comes quite quickly.
   _______________ _______________ ______________

5. The danger, I think, is that the whole building may totally collapse at any time.
   _______________ _______________ ______________

Terms

To check yourself, see if you can briefly describe each of the following terms and illustrate it in a phrase or sentence (underlining the relevant part).

adverbs:
adjuncts place intensifiers
conjuncts manner
disjuncts frequency
time
focussing adjuncts:
  restrictive (*only, just, solely, and so on*)
  additive (*even, in particular, as well, likewise*)

connexions:
  - co-ordinating
  - correlative
  - subordinating (or, conjunctive adverbs)

Answers to Exercise 10.1:

1. focussing adjunct; time
2. (indefinite) time; intensifier; manner
3. time; manner; place (direction)
4. frequency; intensifier; manner
5. intensifier; manner

Answers to Exercise 10.2:

1. frequency; manner; frequency
2. time; manner; intensifier
3. intensifier; location
4. intensifier; frequency; intensifier
5. manner, manner, manner

Answers to Exercise 10.3:

1. disjunct, adjunct (frequency), adjunct (manner)
2. disjunct, adjunct (intensifier), adjunct (manner)
3. conjunct, adjunct (manner), adjunct (place)
4. conjunct, adjunct (intensifier), adjunct (manner)
5. disjunct, adjunct (manner), adjunct (time)