

Position of adjectives

- A** Many adjectives can be used either before the noun they describe, or following linking verbs such as **appear, be, become, feel, get, and seem** (see Unit 21). Compare:
- The **high price** surprised him. *and* The price **seemed high**.

- B** Some adjectives are seldom or never used before the noun they describe. These include –
- ☆ some 'a-' adjectives:

- The horse **was alone** in the field.
(*but not* The alone horse ...)

Also: afraid, alike, alive, ashamed, asleep, awake, aware

Some have related adjectives that can be used before a noun or after a linking verb. Compare:

- The animal **was alive**. *and* A **living** animal.
(*or* A **live** animal. / The animal **was living**.)

Also: afraid – frightened, alike – similar, alone – lone, asleep – sleeping

- ☆ some adjectives used to describe health and feelings:
- My son **felt unwell**. (*but not* My unwell son ...)
- These are sometimes used between an adverb and noun e.g. 'a terminally **ill** patient'.

Also: content, fine, glad, ill (but 'ill health'), sorry, (un)sure, upset (but 'an upset stomach'), well (but 'He's really not a well man')

- C** *Emphasising adjectives* are used to emphasise your feelings about something. Compare:

- I felt a fool. *and* I felt a **complete** fool. (for emphasis)

Some emphasising adjectives (such as **complete**, and also **absolute, entire, mere, sheer, total, utter**) are seldom or never used after a linking verb:

- It was a **total** failure. (*but not usually* The failure was total.)

Classifying adjectives are used to say that something is of a particular type. Like emphasising adjectives, classifying adjectives are seldom or never used after a linking verb:

- a **nuclear** explosion (*but not usually* 'The explosion was nuclear', unless we particularly want to emphasise a contrast with other kinds of explosion)

Also: atomic, chemical, digital, domestic, environmental, medical; general, occasional, northern (etc.), maximum, minimum, underlying

Qualitative adjectives are used to give the quality that a thing or person has. We use them either directly before a noun or after a linking verb. Compare:

- a **beautiful** sunset The sunset **was beautiful**.

Note that some classifying adjectives can also be used with different meanings as qualitative adjectives and placed after a linking verb. Compare:

- The country's **economic** reforms. *and*
 The process isn't **economic**. (= not profitable)

Also: academic, conscious, educational, (il)legal, scientific

- D** Many adjectives can be used immediately after a noun, at the beginning of a reduced relative clause (see Unit 69B). For example –

☆ adjectives before a **to-infinitive**, or a prepositional phrase as part of the adjective phrase:

- It was a **speech calculated to appeal** to the unions.
 He is a **manager capable of making** difficult decisions.

☆ some **-ible** and **-able** adjectives such as **available, imaginable, possible, suitable**. However, we use these adjectives immediately after a noun *only* when the noun follows **the** or when the noun is made definite by what follows in a relative clause:

- This was **the** most difficult **decision imaginable**.
 It is a **treatment suitable for all children with asthma**.

☆ the adjectives **concerned, involved, opposite, present, proper, responsible**. These words have different meanings when they are used *before* a noun and immediately after it. Compare:

- All the **people present** (= who were there) approved of the decision. *and*
 I was asked for my **present address**. (= my address now)

Exercises

66.1 If necessary, correct these sentences, or write ✓ if they are already correct. (B)

- 1 After the accident I tried to comfort the upset driver of the car.
After the accident I tried to comfort the driver of the car, who was upset.
- 2 In the distance I could see an alone figure walking towards me.
- 3 It wasn't a great surprise when Rahim died as he hadn't been a well man for years.
- 4 I remember her as a glad person who was always smiling.
- 5 He stood at the bedroom door, looking at his asleep daughter.
- 6 The fire on the ship is under control, but there are still many afraid passengers on board.
- 7 She spent most of her life nursing seriously ill children in the hospital.
- 8 The two children were of an alike age.
- 9 We were unsure which way to go.
- 10 The sorry girls apologised to their teacher for their behaviour.

66.2 Complete each pair of sentences using one pair of adjectives from the box. If an adjective can be used in both sentences, write it in both; if not, write it only in one. (Use a dictionary if necessary.) (C)

domestic – unsafe educational – entertaining
inevitable – utter legal – stupid serious – underlying

- 1 a The experiment was a / an failure.
b After Dr Owen left the project, its failure was
- 2 a None of the equipment in the warehouse is
- b The shop doesn't sell equipment.
- 3 a The trip to the wildlife park was a / an experience.
b The toys were and the children played with them for hours.
- 4 a The computer fault was enough to disrupt all the work in the office.
b The problem has not yet been solved.
- 5 a He was involved in a argument with his neighbour over a tree in the garden.
b It's completely to charge a fee for entry into the museum.

66.3 Write the word in brackets in one of the spaces in each sentence, either before or after the noun (or both if possible). (Use a dictionary if necessary.) (D)

- 1 The party was excellent, and I'd like to thank all the people
(concerned)
- 2 As the minister for the health service, I think he should resign.
(responsible)
- 3 The new machinery was intended to increase output, but it seems to have had the
effect (opposite)
- 4 Children are only admitted when accompanied by a / an adult
(responsible)
- 5 It's the only room in the hotel that night. (available)
- 6 The pond on the village green was filled in with the approval of local
residents. (apparent)
- 7 Cars drive too fast past the school and parents have complained to
the police. (concerned)
- 8 For those who need it, there is financial advice (available)