ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

- Both adjectives and adverbs describe other words more closely: adjectives describe nouns; adverbs describe verbs and other adjectives and adverbs.

Doreen has fluffy hair and a musky odor. (adjectives describing nouns)
She smokes constantly and dances suggestively. (adverbs describing verbs)
She is deliberately sarcastic about other people. (adverb describing adjective)
But she is almost always nice to Esther. (adverb describing another adverb)

As you can see from the above example, we form adverbs by adding –ly to the adjective. However, adjectives ending in –ly (lovely, friendly, early, ghostly) do not change when they are used as adverbs. Some adverbs (often, always, very, far, here, there) do not end in –ly. When in doubt, check your dictionary!

- Use adjectives as subject complements.
  Esther is disturbed.
  She is intelligent, talented, and insane.

- Because verbs like look, appear, seem, feel, smell, and taste describe states of being rather than actions, use adjectives.
  Esther seems normal.
  She appears confident, but she feels inadequate.
  She looks ordinary but has intense feelings of self-doubt.

However, if taste and look are used as action verbs, use adverbs.
  Esther tastes happiness awkwardly.
  She looks regretfully at her past.

- Past participles (the –ed form of verbs) can be used as adjectives to describe nouns. Make sure you include the –ed ending!
  In Esther’s distorted thoughts, Buddy was her last chance at love.
  Her warped memory increased her agitation.

- Make sure you distinguish between the following adjectives and adverbs. In spoken language, we often confuse them with each other.

  good / well:
  Dr. Nolan is a good doctor; she analyzes patients well.
  Watch out: When used with “look,” good and well mean different things:
  Dodo looks good despite having so many children. [she looks attractive]
  Dodo looks well. [she looks healthy]

  real / really:
  Joan is a real basketcase; she really needs psychiatric help.

  sure / surely:
  Esther is not sure if she is ready to leave the asylum. She surely needs reinforcement from her doctors.

  bad / badly:
  Esther has a bad experience with shock treatments; they affect her brain badly.

►Did you like the sample sentences? Get the whole story in Sylvia Plath’s The Bell Jar.