



Hello. I'm Margot Politis. Welcome to Study English, IELTS preparation.

Today on Study English we're looking at 'adjectives'. How do you use them, how do you order them, and how do you use them to compare and describe things?

First, let's listen to some descriptions about the world under the sea, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, off the north coast of Australia. It's quite an amazing place.

We know more about the surface of the moon or the surface of Mars, than we do about the sea floor. The sea floor remains the last unexplored frontier. This is because it's covered by this impenetrable ocean layer that we can't see through. The only way we can see the sea floor is using sonar.

The largest reef they mapped is about 10 or so kilometres across. It's an oval-shaped feature, so it covers around 100 square kilometres. Because of the fact that they are submerged in 30m or so of water, the reefs are very hard to see. No one had realised that the Gulf contained reefs just like the Great Barrier Reef.

Being able to describe things properly is an important communication skill.

You need 'adjectives' for descriptions.

They usually come before the nouns they are describing.

'The red car.'

But when you want to accurately describe something, you often need to use more than one adjective in a row.

What if the car is big, red, and made of plastic?

We call it 'the big, red, plastic car'.

Notice that the adjectives are usually separated by commas.

But why don't we call it the 'red, plastic, big car'?

How do you know which order to put the adjectives in?





Well, for native speakers, it's just that it sounds right, but luckily, there are some rules.

It's called the 'royal order of adjectives'.

Let's have a look at it.

First we have the 'determiner'. That's 'articles' [a, an, the], 'numbers', or the word that describes the amount of something. It can also be the 'owner', the person or thing who the noun belongs to.

So determiners can be 'a', 'the', 'many', 'some', or a name, like 'John's'.

So we have 'a car', 'many cars', 'John's car'.

The second type of adjective is 'opinion' or 'observation'. This tells you something about the quality of the noun - useful, cheap, ugly, beautiful.

Then we have 'size', for example enormous, tiny, huge;

followed by 'age', it could be old, modern, 7-year-old;

then 'shape', perhaps oval, circular or flat;

a 'colour', like white, black or blue.

Then we have adjectives that describe 'origin', where the noun is from, for example Thai, Indonesian, Australian;

followed by 'material', what the thing is made of, like copper, plastic or wooden.

Lastly, is the 'qualifier'. This is something that's an integral part of the noun. Examples might be a rocking chair, a wedding ring, an electric oven.

There are of course a few exceptions to these rules, but it's important that you learn them, and practice them whenever you can.

Have a look at these words, and see if you can turn them into a phrase:

'wooden' 'square' 'useful' 'box' 'Lily's'

Well, 'box' is the noun, but what comes first?

The 'determiner'. Whose box is it? It's Lily's box.

So 'Lily's' comes first.

Royal Order of Adjectives
Determiner
Observation
Physical Description Size Shape Age Colour
Origin
Material
Qualifier
Noun



Then that's followed by the 'observation' – the box is 'useful'.

Then, the 'shape'. It's 'square'.

Then, finally the material. It's a 'wooden' box.

So we have 'Lily's useful, square, wooden box'.

Good. Now let's listen to some strings of adjectives from the clip.

The sea floor remains the last unexplored frontier. This is because it's covered by this impenetrable ocean layer that we can't see through. The largest reef they mapped is about 10 or so kilometres across.

He calls the sea floor 'the last unexplored frontier'.

Let's look at that phrase.

'Frontier' is the noun. The others are all describing the noun.

First, we have the determiners 'the' and 'last'

'Last' expresses a number, so it goes second.

Then 'unexplored'. That's an observation. It's a quality of the frontier.

OK. Now what about 'this impenetrable ocean layer'?

Well, 'layer' is the noun. All the other words are 'adjectives'.

'This' is the determiner.

'Impenetrable' is an observation. It describes a quality of the ocean layer.

'Ocean' here is the qualifier. Almost part of the noun, it's not just a 'layer', it's an 'ocean layer'.

OK, now you try one.

Look at these words. They form a phrase that he used: 'largest', 'reef', 'the'.

Well, 'reef' is the noun, so it comes last.

'The' is a determiner, so it comes first.

'Largest' describes the size, so that comes after 'the'.

So we have 'the largest reef'.

OK. There's another way adjectives can be used as well.



They can stand alone. They describe nouns by following the verb 'to be'.

When used in this way, adjectives are 'complements'.

Listen to one here.

The Gulf of Carpentaria is very flat and featureless.

'The Gulf of Carpentaria is very flat and featureless'.

In a phrase, this would be 'the very flat, featureless Gulf of Carpentaria'.

But used as a 'complement', the phrase becomes a full sentence.

'The Gulf of Carpentaria is very flat and featureless'.

We can take the phrase 'the big red car' and turn it into a sentence.

'The car is big, red and plastic'.

Notice that the *order* of adjectives still stays the same.

Now, let's look at how you go about describing things. It's often necessary to focus on particular features, such as shape, size, dimension, weight, colour or texture.

The more you have built up your vocabulary of adjectives, the better your ability to describe things accurately.

So you might write up adjective lists according to groups.

To describe shapes we can say:

'circular', 'triangular', 'rectangular', 'spherical', but we just say 'square'.

It's also possible to describe something by saying it's 'like' something common.

So we can say something is 'egg-shaped', or 'kidney-shaped'.

Listen.

The largest reef they mapped is about 10 or so kilometres across. It's an oval-shaped feature, so it covers around 100 square kilometres.

When you're writing, you should always aim to make your descriptions as accurate as you can.





But sometimes you can't be exact, and you need just describe something approximately.

The largest reef they mapped is about 10 or so kilometres across. It's an oval-shaped feature, so it covers around 100 square kilometres. Because of the fact that they are submerged in 30m or so of water, they reefs are very hard to see.

Dr Harris uses the words 'about', 'around', 'or so' with numbers.

'About' 10 kilometres or so.

'Around' 100 square kilometres.

30 metres 'or so'.

Notice that the phrase 'or so', always comes after the number, but the others all come before.

You might also hear people say 'around about'.

In formal language, we'd probably say 'approximately'.

These are all signs that the amount is not exact.

And now, it's around about time for me to go. I'll see you next time for more Study English.

Bye bye.