

Position of adverbs

I. Three positions

II. Adverbs used in one, two or all three positions

III. Position of adverbs of manner, place and time in one sentence

I. Three positions of adverbs

1. Front

Adverb	Subject	Verb	
<i>Gradually,</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>changed</i>	<i>his mind.</i>

2. Mid

a) Subject		Adverb	Main verb	
<i>They</i>	-----	<i>always</i>	<i>speak</i>	<i>English.</i>
b) Subject	"be"	Adverb	-----	
<i>We</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>almost</i>	-----	<i>ready.</i>
c) Subject	Auxiliary	Adverb	Main verb	
<i>I</i>	<i>have</i>	<i>never</i>	<i>said</i>	<i>that.</i>
<i>She</i>	<i>will</i>	<i>probably</i>	<i>join</i>	<i>us.</i>
<i>This</i>	<i>can</i>	<i>hardly</i>	<i>be</i>	<i>true.</i>

Notes:

- With **main verbs**, the adverb comes **before the verb**:

*They **always** speak English.*

- With **"be"**, it comes **after the verb**:

*We **are** almost ready.*

- With **auxiliaries and modals**, it is placed **after the auxiliary/modal** (between the auxiliary/modal and the main verb):

*I have **never** said that.*

*She will **probably** join us.*

*This can **hardly** be true.*

If there are **two auxiliaries or a modal and an auxiliary**, the adverb is placed **after the first verb**:

*The experiment has **always** been done like this.*

*They may **never** have used this method.*

3. End

Subject	Verb		Adverb
<i>He</i>	<i>spoke</i>	<i>about his plans</i>	<i>at the meeting.</i>
<i>She</i>	<i>has been attending</i>	<i>the English class</i>	<i>regularly.</i>

Note:

Below you will find some **basic guidelines** and examples of usage. You should, however, be aware that there may be several options, depending on what the speaker wants to put

emphasis on. Neither the rules nor the examples pretend to be exhaustive. Remember that the positions listed here may not be suitable in all contexts. In some cases, the position of the adverb may also modify its meaning. Nevertheless, there is no need to despair: through intensive reading of English texts and listening to native speakers you will develop a feeling for these words and their place in the sentence.

II. Adverbs used in one, two or all three positions

1. Adverbs used mostly in mid position

frequency	always, ever, hardly ever, never, often, rarely, seldom
degree	almost, hardly, nearly, quite, scarcely
probability	certainly, definitely, probably
time	just

*He has **never** attended an international conference.*

*I **quite** understand what you mean.*

*He is **probably** back.*

2. Adverbs used mostly in front or mid position

frequency/time	sometimes, usually; eventually, finally
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*I **sometimes** work till late at night.*

***Sometimes**, I work till late at night.*

3. Adverbs used mostly in mid or end position

frequency	constantly, continuously, regularly
degree	completely, entirely, greatly
time	already, lately, recently

*The temperature was **constantly** rising.*

*The temperature was rising **constantly**.*

*I **completely** agree with you.*

*I agree with you **completely**.*

4. Adverbs used mostly in end or front position

place	above, here, there, at home, upstairs
time/frequency	in January, last year; as a rule, from time to time, once
probability	maybe, perhaps

Notes:

- With adverbs of place, time and frequency, the end position is more common; the **front position** is used to **give importance** or draw attention to the adverb:

*You will find a more detailed description **below**.*

***Below** you will find a more detailed description.*

*I offered him help **once**, but he refused it.*
Once I offered him help, but he refused it.

*I started to learn English **last year**.*
Last year, I started to learn English.

- With **maybe** and **perhaps**, the front position is more common.
Perhaps, you should ask him for help.

5. Adverbs used in any of the three positions

manner	briefly, carefully, easily, quickly, slowly
time/frequency	now, soon, immediately, suddenly; occasionally
aspect	economically, financially, logically, scientifically, technically
probability	apparently, certainly, clearly, evidently, obviously

Manner: *In this chapter we **briefly** examine the latest developments in*
***Briefly**, I think we should join this project. (in brief)*
*Let me describe **briefly** how we arrived at this conclusion.*
*He explained the situation **briefly**.*
 Not: *He explained briefly the situation.*
 If the **verb has an object**, the **adverb** comes **after the object**.
 Only when the **object is long**, the **adverb may precede it**:
*We considered **briefly** our next steps in that unexpected situation.*

Time: *The situation **suddenly** changed.*
*The situation changed **suddenly**.*
***Suddenly**, the situation changed.*
 The mid position is the most common. The end position draws attention to the adverb. The front position is the least common; it is used to raise interest in what is coming next.

Aspect: ***Technically**, this is no problem.*
*This is no problem, **technically**.*
*This is, **technically**, no problem.*
 The end and front positions are the most common.

Probability: *This is **obviously** a mistake.*
*This is a mistake, **obviously**.*
***Obviously**, this is a mistake.*

6. Adverbs used mostly in front position

comment/opinion	admittedly, evidently, hopefully, naturally, surprisingly
sentence linkers	however, consequently, as a result, nevertheless

Comment/opinion: ***Surprisingly**, the experiment did not fail.*
 Sometimes these adverbs may also come in mid position:
*He was **evidently** nervous.*

Sentence linkers: *This is a simple and safe procedure. **However**, you should not underestimate the risk.*
 See also Guidelines for Academic Writing: Text structure (Sentence linkers).

Note the **use of commas** before and after the adverb in some cases. For more information see Guidelines for Academic Writing: Punctuation.

III. Position of adverbs of manner, place, and time in one sentence

Normal position

	Manner	Place	Time
He worked	very hard		last semester.
I didn't participate		in that conference	last year.
He explained that problem	thoroughly	at the seminar	last week.

The position can be changed in order to

- emphasize/draw attention to one adverb: *Last year I didn't participate in that conference.*
- avoid putting the longest adverb in the middle: *I lived quite happily for one year in one of the remotest places in the world.*
- avoid placing too many adverbs in the end position: *In the mountains it is dangerous to drive quickly in winter.*

See also A Remedial Course in English Grammar: Word order (Statements).

EXERCISES

I. Tick the place where you would put the adverbs in bold type.

That		has		occurred		to me.	never
I		have		appreciated		his help.	always
He		lost		his job		last year.	nearly
I		forgot		to tell you		about the change.	completely
He		could		have done		anything else.	hardly
The lab		is		open		all night.	often
Have		you		been		to England?	ever
He		has		returned		from abroad.	just
I		see		him		these days.	rarely
We		expected		him		to be there on time.	certainly
She		is		at home		in the evening.	hardly ever
They		are		complaining		about something.	constantly
I		slept		the night		before the exam.	hardly

She		needs		a holiday		soon.	definitely
He		could		say		one word.	scarcely
This method		is		used		for such purposes.	seldom

II. In which positions are the adverbs most likely to be used? Tick their numbers.

In some cases there are more options than one.

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|--|--------------|
| 1. We have 1) made 2) some radical changes 3). | (already) |
| 2. 1) The discussion 2) takes 3) one hour. | (usually) |
| 3. 1) He 2) helps us 3) with the experiments 4). | (sometimes) |
| 4. The world 1) is 2) changing 3). | (constantly) |
| 5. 1) They 2) agreed 3) on the higher education reform 4). | (finally) |
| 6. They 1) discussed 2) the issue 3). | (thoroughly) |
| 7. 1) The problem will 2) be 3) solved by tomorrow 4). | (hopefully) |
| 8. 1) The spring semester 2) ends 3) at the end of May 4). | (as a rule) |
| 9. 1) I 2) could 3) help you 4). | (maybe) |
| 10. 1) They 2) discussed 3) the differences between the calculated and measured values 4). | (thoroughly) |

III. Put the adverbs in the position which is the most likely in the given context.

1. regularly

- a) Accidents occur at this crossing. (= usually)
b) They meet every three months.

2. greatly

- a) The prices varied
b) I admired his courage

3. completely

- a) I forgot to tell you about the change.
b) If you can't trust him, don't let him handle the grant.

4. soon

- a) We didn't have to persuade him. He decided to join our team
b) He decided to join our team as he was very much interested in our project.

5. once

- a) We have met before. (= one time; jednou, jedenkrát)
b) He told us about his life in Africa. (= at some point in the past; jednou, kdysi)

IV. Put the adverbs listed below in different positions in the sentences. Explain in what situations the speaker/writer might use the different options.

1. The lecture was over. John left the room. **immediately**
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.....
.....
2. He pressed the button. **carefully**
.....
.....
.....

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|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 3. That conclusion is wrong. | apparently |
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| 4. Their argument makes sense. | logically |
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| 5. He entered the room. | slowly |
| | |
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| | |
| 6. Such behaviour isn't acceptable. | socially |
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| | |

V. Complete the sentences. Use the words and phrases in brackets and put them in the most likely non-emphatic positions.

1. The students waited for the Dean ... /for half an hour, patiently, in the secretary's office/
.....
2. Don't take what he says. /seriously/
.....
3. He will be /late/today/probably/
.....
4. We discussed this problem ... /at the seminar/last/on Monday/
.....
5. The exam requirements will remain the same ... /this year/hopefully/
.....
6. He sits ... /for two hours/every evening/usually/at his computer/
.....
7. She has done ... /well/in maths/this semester/really/
.....
8. Read your paper ... before mailing it. /at least/carefully/twice.
.....
9. She is coming ... /on Monday morning/certainly/to the lecture/
.....
10. He stays ... /in the evening/hardly ever/at home/
.....