Adjective rules in English

What is an adjective?

An adjective is a word used to describe something. When you use an adjective, you say something about a noun or subject you are talking about. Words like long, short, blue, red, big, small, etc... are all adjectives. They provide more details about the people, places, or things you want to describe.

An adjective can indicate...

- the quantity → five, eleven, several, a few
- the size → tall, massive, big, huge, tiny...
- the condition → easy, important, rich, expensive, broken, damaged, dusty, wet...
- the color → blue, red, green...
- the appearance → pretty, delicious, beautiful, interesting...
- the personality → calm, happy, proud, angry, jealous
- the age → old, young, new, ancient
- the temperature → cold, warm, hot...
- the shape → round, square, deep, narrow...
- the origin → Japanese, Spanish, French...
- the material → silver, glass, wooden
- the sound → loud, noisy, quiet
- the time → slow, fast

Adjectives are placed before nouns:

- a yellow bike
- a dark sky
- a scary movie

Adjectives are placed after the verb:

- The bike is yellow
- The sky becomes dark
- The movie seems scary

Several adjectives can be used in a row:

- a nice old house

If there are more than two, they are often separated by commas, unless they are short (more than three adjectives in a row is not very common...):

- a nice little green car
- a strange, mysterious, frightening house.
In English, adjectives never take -s in the plural, they are invariable:

- Paul and Sarah are thin and tall.

Adjectives can be qualified by using adverbs that are placed before the adjective: very really, so, too much, rather, quite, a little, almost, enough.

- She is really pretty.

⚠ enough is always placed after the adjective:

- He is big enough.

When using an adjective of colour or nationality with another adjective, it is usually the closest to the noun:

- They sell big Italian pizzas in this restaurant.
- There's a big black dog in the garden.

In English, compound adjectives can be created from a noun to make a physical description under the following construction: adjective-noun + ed

- The police are looking for a short-haired woman.

Adjectives can be formed by adding the ending -ed or -ing to some verbs:

- interest → interested / interesting

Most adjectives can be comparative or superlative:

- big → bigger, biggest
- high → higher, highest
- good → better, best
- beautiful → more beautiful, most beautiful
- large → larger, largest

Some adjectives are sometimes followed by a preposition that introduces their complement: proud of, good at, afraid of, terrified of, satisfied with, happy with, addicted to, worried about...

- She is addicted to her smartphone. → Elle est accro à son smartphone.
- He is terrified of spiders. → Il est terrifié par les araignées.

Some adjectives sometimes have particular endings:

- -able → washable, adorable, uncomfortable
- -ible → invisible, responsible, incredible
- -al → educational, gradual, illegal, nocturnal, viral
- -an → American, Mexican, urban
- -ant → constant, distant, elegant, important...
-ar → cellular, popular, spectacular, vulgar
-ent → intelligent, potent, silent, violent
-ful → careful, harmful, powerful, tasteful, thoughtful
-ic → athletic, energetic, scientific
-ical → magical
-ine → bovine, canine, equine, feminine, masculine
-ile → agile, docile, fertile, virile
-ish → childish
-ive → informative, native, talkative
-less → careless, endless, homeless, timeless
-ous → cautious, dangerous, enormous, malodorous
-some → awesome, handsome, lonesome, wholesome
-y → dirty, pretty, angry, busy, wealthy, windy