

## Adverbs and Adverbials, notes on entries in the Oxford Companion to the English Language

**a point to add somewhere:** adverbials generally modify what follows, unless they are at the end of the sentence (in which case they modify the immediately preceding phrase). Compare: I arranged to meet her at the cafe. At the cafe, I arranged to meet her. In the first sentence, “at the cafe” indicates the place of the meeting. In the second, it indicates where the arrangement was made, modifying the entire sentence.

**Question:** do all adverbials at the beginning of a sentence modify the entire sentence? I think so. They may either set the context or circumstances, or they may indicate a logical connection with the previous sentence.

**ADVERB:** from Latin adverbium (a word) added to a word or verb; used to modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs

**ADVERBIAL** (1) Relating to an adverb: an adverbial clause. (2) A word, phrase, or clause that modifies a verb or a verb plus other words.

### 1. Form

- a) adjectives + -ly or -ally
- b) nouns + other suffixes: -wise as in clockwise, lengthwise, and -ward(s) as in northwards, skyward.
- c) adverbs with no suffixes (here, there, now, just, well)
- d) compounds (therefore, nevertheless).
- e) adverbial particles, used along with verbs: in, out, on, off, up, down, etc. See PHRASAL VERB.

### 2. Adverbs modify:

- a) adjectives
- b) other adverbs
- c) verbs
- d) verbs together with some other part of the sentence (*She handled the matter competently*).
  - Adverbs in group C & D are sometimes said to have an adverbial function, like prepositional phrases and clauses
- e) sentences
- f) prepositions (*He kicked the ball well past the line.*)
- g) pronouns and determiners (*They admitted virtually everybody.*)
- h) noun phrases (*It was quite a quarrel.*)
- i) nouns of time and place (*in the week afterwards*)
- j) complement of certain prepositions (*by now*)

### 3. WH-adverbs: how, when, where, why, and combinations such as whenever and wherever

- a) introduce WH-questions (*When did they come?*)
- b) introduce certain types of subordinate clauses (*He told us when they had come*).

### 4. Intensifying adverbs (which modify other adverbs)

- a) Examples: more humbly, very humbly.
- b) Only a small number of gradable adverbs take comparative and superlative inflections, many of them having the same forms as the corresponding adjective: work hard/ harder / hardest; drive fast/faster/fastest. There are also some irregular forms: plays well/better/best (compare good/ better/best plays), sings badly/worse/worst (compare bad/worse/worst songs)

### 5. Use:

- a) **most** adverbials are **optional** and may be omitted
- b) **Some verbs require an adverbial** (hence, phrasal verbs)

### Three general types: Conjuncts, Disjuncts, and Adjuncts

6. sentence adverbials – conjuncts and disjuncts – modify the sentence as a whole
  - a) no agreement on the adverbials to be counted as sentence adverbials
  - b) modifies either a sentence as a whole (unfortunately in *Unfortunately, the bank will not give me a large enough mortgage*) or a clause within a sentence

- c) **conjuncts** indicate a connection between the unit in which they appear and another usually preceding unit
  - d) **disjuncts** are a comment on the content or manner of what is being said or written: *frankly, surprisingly*
  - e) most adverbs that function as conjuncts or disjuncts may have other functions.
7. **adjuncts** (all other adverbials)

**Conjuncts.** Most conjuncts are adverbs (also known as conjunctive adverbs) and prepositional phrases. Their role can be demonstrated through paraphrases. In the sentence *The shop ran out of liver before my turn came, so I raced to another shop*, “so” can be paraphrased as “because the shop ran out of liver before my turn came,” giving the reason for what is said in the sentence or clause that it introduces.

8. Conjuncts are grammatically **distinct from coordinating conjunctions**

- a) the two types can occur together
- b) most conjuncts are not restricted to initial position
- c) units linked typically are sentences or clauses
- d) may be between smaller units: yet in *She was over ninety and yet in full possession of her mental faculties*. can also link paragraphs or sequences of paragraphs

9. Conjuncts signal a variety of **connective meanings**, such as:

- a) listing (first, firstly, first of all, second, secondly, next, finally, also, furthermore);
- b) summarizing (overall);
- c) apposition (for example, for instance, namely, in other words);
- d) result (so, therefore, consequently); inference (then);
- e) contrast (on the one hand/on the other hand, rather, however, nevertheless);
- f) transition (incidentally).

On the whole, conjuncts are a closed class of items that can be listed, with the exception of enumerative adverbs (first, second, etc.) which make up a potentially infinite list.

### **Disjuncts, two kinds: style disjuncts and content disjuncts**

**Style disjuncts express** comments by speakers on the **style or manner** in which they are speaking: *frankly*, as in *Frankly, you have no chance of winning* (= I am telling you this frankly); *personally* in *Personally, I'd have nothing to do with them*; *with respect* in *With respect, it is not up to you to decide*; *if I may say so* in *They are rather rude, if I may say so*; *because she told me so* in *She won't be there, because she told me so* (= I know that because she told me so).

**Content disjuncts comment on the content** of what is being said.

- 10. The most common express degrees of certainty and doubt as to what is being said: *perhaps* in *Perhaps you can help me*; *undoubtedly* in *Undoubtedly, she is the winner*; *obviously* in *Obviously, she had no wish to help us*.
- 11. Others evaluate the content of the utterance, conveying some attitude towards it: that it is surprising (*Unexpectedly, he arrived home and found them*; *To my surprise, nobody came*) or not surprising (*Naturally, I wanted to help*; *Understandably, she was annoyed*); that it is fortunate (*Happily, they came to me first*; *Luckily, we already knew about it*) or unfortunate (*Sadly, he died in an air crash*; *Tragically, we heard about it too late*).
- 12. Some pass judgement on the topic raised or indicate an emotional position: *Rightly, she objected to what they were doing*; *Foolishly, he asked for more money*; *To my annoyance, nobody came*.
- 13. Conjuncts and disjuncts may consist of more than one word.

**Adjuncts. Adverbials integrated within the structure of the sentence** are adjuncts.

Adjuncts can be questioned and negated. *She took off her jacket because she felt hot.* (Why did she take off her jacket?) and *She didn't take off her jacket because she felt hot, but for some other reason.*

Also, a *because*-clause can be the focus of a cleft sentence: *It was because she felt hot that she took off her jacket.*

**ADVERBIAL CLAUSE.** A subordinate clause with an adverbial function: the *when*-clause in *'He got angry when I started to beat him at table tennis.'* Adverbial clauses express such meanings as time, place, condition, concession, reason, purpose, and result.

**ADVERBIAL PARTICLE.** A particle with an adverbial function, as in phrasal verbs: for example, *out* in *I've turned out the light*, and *up* in *We gave up*.

Adverbs that typically have other functions also serve as disjuncts. Such a use occasionally arouses objections, as when *hopefully*, usually a manner adverb as in *He waited hopefully for his results*, is used as a content disjunct, as in *Hopefully, we won't have to wait much longer*. The use of an adverb as a disjunct can be unusual, as in: *'Awkwardly, President Reagan's most forceful and innovative cabinet officer is in charge of a department that has marginal responsibility . . .'* (*The Economist*, 23 Nov. 1985); *'Borges signed manifestos against the dictator and the dictator famously took his job away . . .'* (*London Review of Books*, 7 Aug. 1986).