

202 The order of adjectives

1 Attributive adjectives

- a When two or more adjectives come before a noun, there is usually a fairly fixed order.

beautiful golden sands *a nice new blue coat*

The order depends mainly on the meaning. Look at these groups of adjectives and other modifiers.

Opinion: *nice, wonderful, excellent, lovely, terrible, awful, etc*

Size: *large, small, long, short, tall, etc*

Quality: *clear, busy, famous, important, quiet, etc*

Age: *old, new*

Shape: *round, square, fat, thin, wide, narrow, etc*

Colour: *red, white, blue, green, etc*

Participle forms: *covered, furnished, broken, running, missing, etc*

Origin: *British, Italian, American, etc*

Material: *brick, paper, plastic, wooden, etc*

Type: *human, chemical, domestic, electronic, money (problems), etc*

Purpose: *alarm (clock), tennis (court), walking (boots), etc*

Words from these groups usually come in this order:

opinion + size + quality + age + shape + colour + participle forms + origin + material + type + purpose

an old cardboard box (age + material)

a German industrial company (origin + type)

two small round green discs (size + shape + colour)

a large informative street plan (size + quality + type)

a hard wooden seat (quality + material)

a new improved formula (age + participle form)

increasing financial difficulties (participle form + type)

two excellent public tennis courts (opinion + type + purpose)

NOTE

- a These rules are not absolute. The order can sometimes be different. We sometimes prefer to put a short adjective before a long one.

*a **big** horrible building*

- b *Old* and *young* referring to people often come next to the noun.
a dignified old lady a pale young man
 Here *old* and *young* are unstressed,
- c Words for material are mostly nouns (*brick*), but some are adjectives (*wooden*).
 Words for type can be adjectives (*chemical*) or nouns (***money*** *problems*). Words for purpose are nouns (***alarm*** *clock*) or gerunds (***walking*** *boots*).

b In general, the adjective closest to the noun has the closest link in meaning with the noun and expresses what is most permanent about it. For example, in the phrase *two excellent public tennis courts*, the word *tennis* is closely linked to *courts*, whereas *excellent* is not linked so closely. The fact that the courts are for tennis is permanent, but their excellence is a matter of opinion.

- c When two adjectives have similar meanings, the shorter one often comes first.
a bright, cheerful smile a soft, comfortable chair

Sometimes two different orders are both possible.
a peaceful, happy place/a happy, peaceful place

2 *And* and *but* with attributive adjectives

- a We can sometimes put *and* between two adjectives.
a soft, comfortable chair la soft and comfortable chair
 But we do not normally use *and* between adjectives with different kinds of meanings.

beautiful golden sands (opinion, colour)

- b We use *and* when the adjectives refer to different parts of something.
a black and white sweater (partly black and partly white)

We use *but* when the adjectives refer to two qualities in contrast.
a cheap but effective solution

3 Predicative adjectives

- a The order of predicative adjectives is less fixed than the order before a noun. Except sometimes in a literary style, we use *and* before the last adjective.
The chair was soft and comfortable.

Adjectives expressing an opinion often come last.
The city is old and beautiful.

NOTE
 We can use *nice* and *lovely* in this pattern with *and*.
The room was nice and warm. (= nicely warm)

- b We can use *but* when two qualities are in contrast.
The solution is cheap but effective.