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Adjectives describe a **quality** that something has. Some qualities can vary in intensity or 'grade' while others can't.

For example, the adjective 'cold' has different variations – you can be '*very cold*' or 'a *little cold*'. The adjective '*cold*' is **gradable**.

Other qualities cannot vary in intensity or grade. These adjectives show extreme, absolute or classifying quality. For example, you can't be '*very freezing*', '*a bit boiling*' or '*very married*'.

via https://www.espressoenglish.net/extreme-adjectives-in-english/

Thus, adjectives in English can be **gradable** or **non-gradable**.

Gradable adjectives

Some adjectives can be made **stronger** or **weaker.** They are **gradable** adjectives.

- *These photographs are very **good**.*
- *It's a bit **cold** in here. Shall I turn the fire on?*

1. To show that a person or thing has more or less of a particular quality, we use grading adverbs like '**very**', '**pretty**', '**rather**', '**slightly**', '**fairly**', '**really**', '**extremely**', etc. before them:

- *This cake is **very tasty**.*
- *That movie was **really interesting**.*
- *Mary is **extremely tired**.*

2. A gradable adjective can also have **comparative** and **superlative** forms:

- *My neighbor's house is **bigger** than mine.*

- *My parents' house is **the biggest** house on the street.*

Non-gradable adjectives

Some adjectives describe qualities that are completely present or completely absent. They can't be stronger or weaker. They are **non-gradable adjectives**.

- *The dinner was **fantastic**.*
- *The dog was **dead**.*

1. We do not use adverbs like '*very*', '*pretty*', '*rather*', '*slightly*', '*fairly*', '*really*', '*extremely*', etc. for non-gradable adjectives.

- *It was very fantastic.*
- *It was very freezing outside.*

For example, '*freezing*' already means very cold. Think about the meaning of the words:

- *It's **freezing** outside. (Very cold.)*
- *That film was **terrifying**. (Very scary.)*
- *This meal is **delicious**. (Very tasty.)*

2. Adjectives which identify something as belonging to a particular type, sometimes referred to as **classifying** adjectives, are also non-gradable:

- *It was a **military** vehicle.* (we can't say 'a very military')
- *He plays a **musical** instrument.* (we can't say 'a bit musical')

3. Non-gradable adjectives do not normally have comparative and superlative forms:

- *freezing, more freezing, the most freezing*
- *dead, deader, the deadest*
- *nuclear, more nuclear, the most nuclear*

Note: Some emphasizing adverbs like '**totally**', '**absolutely**', '**completely**', '**perfectly**', etc. are normally used with adjectives that are in themselves already quite absolute (i.e. non-gradable adjectives). They give even greater **emphasis** to what is said:

– *The movie was **absolutely terrifying**.*
– *These exercises are **completely impossible**!*
– *The dinner at Saturday night was **absolutely fantastic**.*

Gradable / non-gradable adjectives

Some adjectives may have more than one meaning or sense. It's possible for the same adjective to be **gradable** with one sense and **non-gradable** with another sense. For example:

- *She sounded slightly **foreign**.*
- *He's advising on **foreign** policy.*

In the first example, the adjective '*foreign*' is gradable because it refers to a measurable quality, whereas in the second, '*foreign*' is non-gradable because it refers to a particular type (of policy).

Some grading adverbs can also used with both gradable and non-gradable adjectives. For example, the adverbs '*really*', '*fairly*' and '*pretty*':

- *It's a **really** interesting class.* ('interesting' is a gradable adjective)
- *It's a **really** fascinating class.* ('fascinating' is a non-gradable adjective)

Watch this video from Espresso English about extreme (non-gradable) adjectives:

See also:

[Descriptive and Demonstrative Adjectives](#)

[Fact and Opinion Adjectives](#)