

Limiting adjectives RESTRICT nouns rather than DESCRIBING them. They can point out a specific object (*the cat, this house, my car*) or set a numerical limit to it (*two dogs, the third book*). *This, some* and *first* are all examples of limiting adjectives.

In this guide, we'll discover what limiting adjectives are, what types of limiting adjectives exist, and how to use them. We'll provide a lot of examples and exercises. Read on!

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What is a Limiting Adjective?

Collins English Dictionary [defines](#) a limiting adjective as “one of a small group of adjectives that modify the nouns to which they are applied by restricting rather than describing or qualifying.”

Descriptive Adjectives and Limiting Adjectives: What is the Difference?

How to tell whether an adjective is descriptive or limiting? They both modify a [noun](#) or a [pronoun](#) but still there's some difference.

Descriptive adjectives – as their name implies – *describe* places, people and things relating to their color, size, shape, and the like. They add meaning to the noun or pronoun

that they modify and come right before it. For instance, in the phrase “*a new car*” the word “*new*” is a descriptive adjective as it defines the noun “*car*” and describes its age or state.

Some more examples:

- *The **fat** boy teased the **small** kids in the park.*

‘Fat’ is a descriptive adjective, it modifies the noun ‘boy’; ‘small’ is a descriptive adjective, it modifies the noun ‘kids’, both of them relate to size.

- *The **attractive** guy fell off his **black** horse.*

‘Attractive’ is a descriptive adjective, it modifies the noun ‘guy’, it relates to appearance; ‘black’ is a descriptive adjective, it modifies the noun ‘horse’, it relates to color.

- *I think he’s pretty **short** for his age.*

‘Short’ is a descriptive adjective, it modifies the pronoun ‘he’; it relates to height.

In a sentence, more than one descriptive adjective can modify the same noun. Look at the following example:

- ***Green leafy** vegetables contain minerals and vitamins.*

‘Green’ and ‘leafy’ are adjectives that refer to color and shape and describe the noun ‘vegetables’.

- ***Bright orange** vegetables contain beta-carotene.*

‘Bright’ and ‘orange’ are adjectives that refer to color and describe the noun ‘vegetables’.

Limiting adjectives, or determining adjectives (often classified as [determiners](#)), *limit* the meaning of nouns or pronouns they modify. They tell “which one,” “how much,” “how many,” or “whose.” For example, notice how the limiting adjective ‘four’ in the following sentence restricts the meaning of the noun ‘women’.

- ***Four** women were talking in the street.*

The word ‘four’ is a limiting adjective as it limits the noun ‘women’ to definite numbers.

- ***The** tiny kitten chased **two** mice into the barn.*

Since we're talking about a specific kitten here, we use the definite article 'the' and restrict the meaning of the noun 'mice' with the word 'two' – only two mice.

Consider different meanings of limiting adjectives:

WHICH ONE?

- I liked **that** haircut.

'That' is a limiting adjective as it restricts the noun 'haircut' meaning a particular haircut and not any haircut in general.

- You should read **this** lesson.

'This' is a limiting adjective as it restricts the noun 'lesson' meaning a particular lesson.

HOW MUCH/MANY?

- The **three** boys in the car are my brothers.

'Three' is a limiting adjective which refers to number and modifies the noun 'boys'.

- There was **little** sugar left in the pot.

'Little' is a limiting adjective meaning 'not much'.

WHOSE?

- I forgot **my** hat at home.

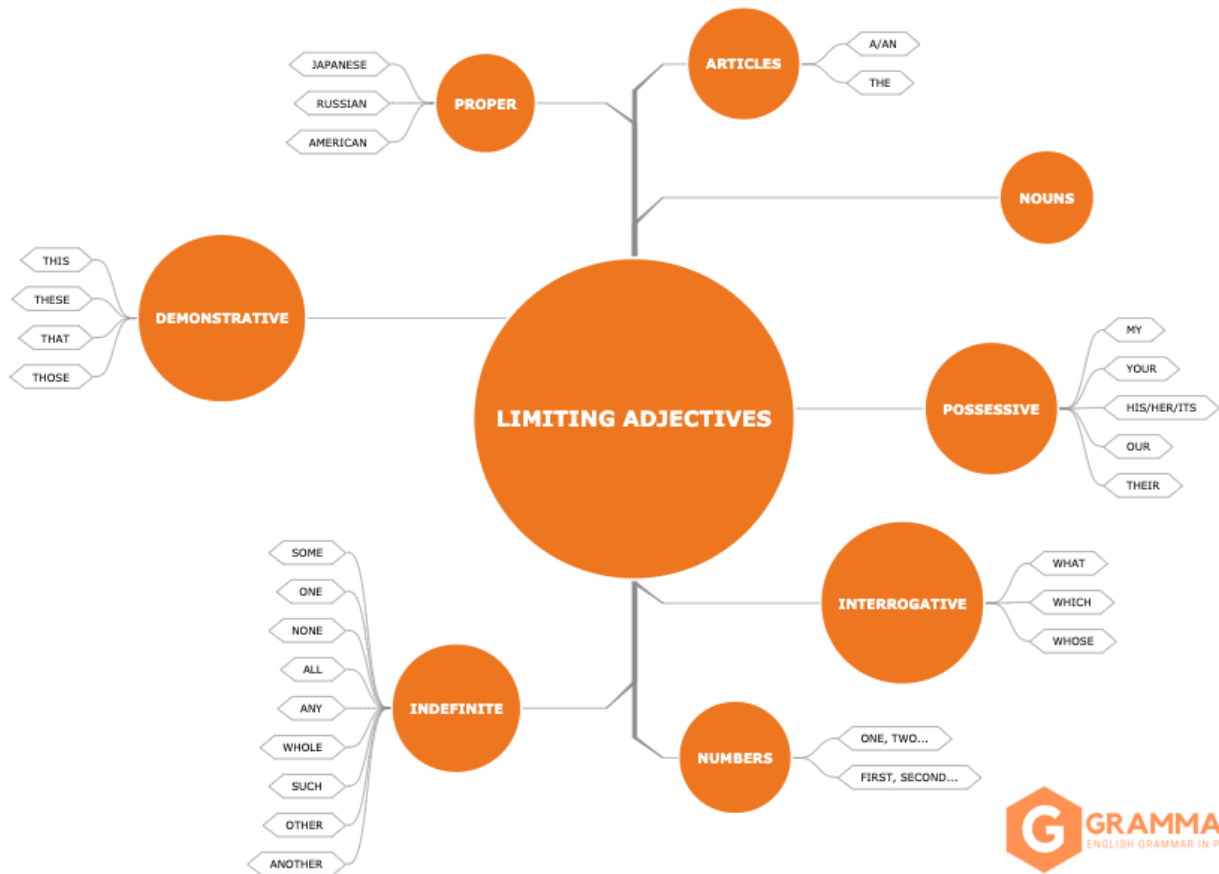
The speaker restricts the meaning to his own hat.

- Did you see **Meg's** book?

The speaker means the particular book that belongs to Meg.

8 Types of Limiting Adjectives

As you have already seen, different parts of speech can act as limiting adjectives. There are eight types of limiting adjectives:



Types of Limiting Adjectives - GrammarTOP.com

Don't worry, we'll outline them all below.

Articles as Limiting Adjectives

To restrict the meaning of a noun, we can use articles. They are the most commonly used limiting adjectives, and, besides, they are the shortest.

'**The**' is called a [definite article](#) because it points out nouns more specifically.

Consider the following examples:

- **The** boys and girls ate huge pieces of cake.

Here, we talk about particular boys and girls. Although we mention them for the first time, we know who we're talking about.

- *My father enjoyed **the** book you gave him.*

We use 'the' to define or identify a particular person or object.

"A" and "an" are called [indefinite articles](#) because they refer to non-specific nouns. We use them when we talk about any one person, place, thing or idea.

Use "a" before consonant sounds: *a bag, a cup, a uniform.*

Use "an" before vowel sounds: *an apple, an excuse.*

Consider the examples:

- *I wish I had **an** umbrella.*

Since we're not talking about a specific umbrella here, we use the indefinite article 'a.'

- *There's **a** position available in my team. **The job** will involve some international travel.*

In the first sentence, we're talking about a position in general and we use the indefinite article 'a.' When the position (or the job) is referred to a second time, we use the definite article 'the' because we're referring to the individual position that has already been mentioned.

Let's summarize: we use '**the**' when you want to refer to a specific thing. And we use '**a**' or '**an**' when you don't need to identify a particular item.

Possessive Limiting Adjectives

The [possessive adjectives](#), as their name implies, modify nouns by showing possession or ownership. The possessive adjectives are: **my, your, his, her, its, our, and their**. They answer the question 'WHOSE?'

For example:

- *Was **your** grammar book expensive?*

In this example, the possessive adjective 'your' modifies the noun 'book' to specify whose book it is.

- We sold **our** dune buggy yesterday.

Here, we use the possessive adjective 'our' to show that the buggy belongs to us.

Some more examples:

- The bookstore sold **his** favorite book.
- He gives **his** baby a candy.
- After many years, they sold **their** house.

Note: Don't confuse possessive adjectives with [possessive pronouns](#).

A **possessive adjective**, like other adjectives, is usually used to **describe** a noun:

— **My** car is bigger than **her** car.

A **possessive pronoun** is used **instead of** a noun:

— *Julie's* car is red. **Mine** is blue.

Possessive adjectives are words like **my, your, our, his, her, its and their**. They are used *before nouns*.

Possessive pronouns are words like **mine, yours, ours, his, hers and theirs**. They are used *alone*.

Compare: *This is **my** book.* - *This book is **mine**.*

Demonstrative Limiting Adjectives

[Demonstrative](#) adjectives are used to modify a noun so that we know which specific person, place, or thing is mentioned. In other words, they *demonstrate* which thing the speaker is describing. This one or that one?

For example:

- **This** tie is too tight.

In this example, 'this' modifies the noun 'tie'. So, we know which tie the speaker is referring to.

- **These** puppies are very playful.

Again, the limiting adjective 'these' points out to some *specific* puppies.

There are four [demonstrative adjectives](#) in English: **this**, **these**, **that**, **those**.

- *this* and *these* indicate that the items are fairly close in space or time,
- while *that* and *those* show the items that are further away.

Use **this** and **that** before [singular nouns](#) and use **these** and **those** before [plural nouns](#).

Consider the following examples:

- *Can you help me to move **this** box?*

In this example, 'this' modifies the noun 'box'. The use of 'this' indicates that the box is close to the speaker.

- *How much is **that** bag?*

Here, the speaker is referring to the bag which is far away.

Some more examples:

- *He lives in **this** house.*
- *They're going to renovate **those** buildings.*

Note: Do not confuse [demonstrative pronouns](#) with demonstrative adjectives. They are identical, but a demonstrative pronoun stands alone, while a demonstrative adjective qualifies a noun.

- ***That** looks good. (demonstrative pronoun)*
- ***That film** is awesome. (demonstrative adjective + noun)*

Indefinite Limiting Adjectives

Indefinite adjectives offer general information about the *amount* of the noun they modify. They are: **some**, **one**, **none**, **all**, **any**, **whole**, **such**, **other**, and **another**. They answer the question 'HOW MANY or HOW MUCH?' but they don't show exactly the amount of something.

Consider the following examples:

- ***All** children will be taught to swim.*

How many children? - All of them.

- *Can you grab **some** milk on your way home?*

Here, the word 'some' doesn't point out to specific amount but gives us enough information that we know we should get milk.

- ***Several** people witnessed the event.*

In this example, the indefinite adjective 'several' modifies the noun 'people' because the specific number of people that have witnessed the event isn't given.

Some more examples:

- *Teresa didn't eat **much** lunch.*
- *I don't have **any** money.*
- *Lena had **other** plans.*

Note: Don't confuse indefinite adjectives and indefinite pronouns. They look similar but function differently. [Indefinite pronouns](#) take the place of nouns. While indefinite adjectives *modify* nouns, they do not replace them.

Consider the following examples:

- *I don't have **any** money.*
- *I don't have **any**.*

Here, "any" is used as an indefinite pronoun and adjective. The first sentence uses any to replace an item (money, perhaps), i.e. it is a pronoun. The second sentence uses any as an adjective to modify money, answering the question, 'How much?'

Interrogative Limiting Adjectives

Interrogative adjectives '**what**', '**which**' and '**whose**' modify nouns and pronouns in *questions*. They are similar to [interrogative pronouns](#), but, unlike the latter, they can't stand on their own.

Consider the examples:

- ***Whose** performance did you enjoy most?*

In this example, 'whose' is an interrogative adjective that modifies the noun 'performance'.

- **What** wooden table should we get for our living room?

Here, 'what' is an interrogative adjective that modifies the noun 'living room'. 'Wooden' is a descriptive adjective that further describes the type of table being sought.

The important point to keep in mind is that interrogative adjectives stand for the thing we *do not know*.

- **Which** hat is Paul's?

Here, we want to know specifically the hat that belongs to Paul.

Some more examples:

- **What** mark will they give us?
- **Which** one is the delicious food in this restaurant?
- **Whose** turn is this?

Cardinal and Ordinal Numbers as Limiting Adjectives

[Numbers](#) (cardinal or ordinal) can function as limiting adjectives telling HOW MANY. There are quite many of them - one, two, three, the fifth, the 250th, etc. An unlimited number.

Consider the examples:

- The **three** girls in the car are my sisters.

Here, 'three' is an adjective referring to number and modifies 'girls'.

- The torch requires **two** AA batteries.

In this example, 'two' is a cardinal adjective that counts the number of batteries needed to use the torch.

Numbers can be [ordinal and cardinal](#). Cardinal adjectives are adjectives that modify the noun by numbering it (stating how many). Ordinal adjectives indicate the position of a noun in a series.

Consider the following examples:

- We spent **three** months living and working in Tunisia.

In this example, the cardinal adjective 'three' modifies the noun 'months' and states the exact period of time.

- This is **the third** month we are trying to get the project.

Here, 'the third' is an ordinal adjective that indicates the position of the month, meaning that there were two months before it.

Proper Adjectives

Proper adjectives, like all adjectives, modify nouns, but they are different from other adjectives because they are formed from [proper nouns](#). They are easily recognizable as they are always capitalized, e.g. **Japanese** food, **Russian** opera. They are often made from the names of cities, countries, or regions to describe the origin of something, but they can also be formed from the names of brands or individuals.

Consider the examples:

- I love **Italian** food.

Here, the proper adjective 'Italian' is formed from the proper noun 'Italy' and modifies the noun 'food.' In other words, 'I like the food that comes from Italy.'

- I'm really excited to use my new **Fuji** camera.

In this example, the word 'Fuji' is the name of the brand but, when put before a noun, it becomes a proper adjective: 'Fuji camera' = 'camera from the Fuji brand.'

Note: A proper adjective is usually formed by adding an ending to the noun. The most common endings are *-ian*, *-an*, *-esque*, *-like*, and *-istic*:

— Portugal - **Portuguese**, Iceland - **Icelandic**, America - **American**, etc.

However, sometimes we don't add any endings to a proper noun to make it an adjective:

— Berlin festival, Canon camera, etc.

Some more examples:

- *She has a real **London** etiquette.*
- *The Fourth of July is an **American** holiday.*
- *This is my favorite **Chinese** restaurant.*

Nouns Used as Limiting Adjectives

Sometimes nouns can be used as adjectives to define or describe another noun. They are put directly before the noun they modify.

For example, in each of these phrases, the first word is a noun but here functions as an adjective modifying the second word: *chicken pie, country government, book writer, Sunday picnic, bicycle thief.*

Compare:

- *Ask the **coffee machine guy** if we need more coffee.*

Here, the phrase 'coffee machine guy' means 'the guy in charge of the coffee machine'.

- *My **English teacher** said my grammar was brilliant.*

In this example, the word 'English' acts as an adjective modifying the noun 'teacher.' The phrase means "a teacher of English", telling us what the teacher teaches.

Consider some more examples:

- *The **computer** exhibition is on Sunday.*
- *Can we go to the **bicycle** shop today?*
- *What is your profession? I'm an **article** writer.*