

Adjective Order

By Heather Wright

Words that are used to describe nouns (people, places, things, or ideas) are called adjectives. You can identify adjectives by asking one of the following questions and seeing if the word answers any of these questions: *which one?*, *what kind?*, *how many?*, *how much?*, or *whose?* The English language normally uses a particular word order when using more than one adjective to describe a noun. Have you ever asked yourself why a phrase like *the metal, ugly, big trash can* is incorrect, and *the ugly, blue, metal trash can* is correct? Below is an explanation with examples:

1. Opinion: Ugly, beautiful, quiet, right, delicious, wonderful, terrible
2. Size: Short, big, small, huge, tiny, miniscule, large
3. Shape: Round, square, triangular, circular, octagonal
4. Condition or state: Wet, rich, intelligent, surprised, hungry, empty
5. Age: Old, young, ancient, antique, teenage
6. Color: Yellow, reddish, mauve, beige, blue-green, off-white
7. Pattern: Striped, polka dotted, checked, plaid
8. Origin/Nationality: Southern, French, Korean, Saudi, African, Asian
9. Material: Cloth, metal, paper, aluminum
10. Purpose: Shopping, drinking, dining

In the early 1990s, a new British author began writing the first *Harry Potter* book.*

↑ ↑
age nationality

The children's many long pairs of pajamas were too small.

↑ ↑
condition size

The toy store had no more square plastic shopping baskets.

↑ ↑ ↑
shape material purpose

The apples in the supermarket were huge, round, and green.*

↑ ↑ ↑
size shape color

*When the list of three or more adjectives comes after a linking verb (verbs that connect the subject with any words that give information about the subject, rather than showing action) to end the sentence, commas are included in the list. If there are only two adjectives after a linking verb, separate them with *and*, as in *The children quickly became hungry and thirsty*.

You may hear people use a slightly different order when speaking; the order for adjectives listed is general, and some people may speak differently.

Try a few of these exercises to practice using the correct adjective order. Place the adjectives in the correct order in each sentence.

1. The girl received _____ gifts for her birthday. (tiny, multiple)
2. All of the students in class took the _____ test. (computerized, simple)
3. Before going to the greenhouse, the horticulture students put on their _____ gloves. (rubber, new, gardening)
4. The _____ women waited for the server to come to their table. (refined, Chinese)
5. The box was full of _____ and _____ puppies. (white, spotted, black)
6. The state of Colorado is _____, _____, and _____. (square, large, mountainous)
7. Did you know that cheetahs are _____, _____, and _____? (carnivorous, beautiful, endangered)
8. The _____ furniture was sold yesterday. (Swedish, green)

Adjective Order Answer Key
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1. The girl received **multiple (condition) tiny (size)** gifts for her birthday.
2. All of the students in the class took the **simple (opinion) computerized (condition)** test.
3. Before going to the greenhouse, the horticulture students put on their **new (age) rubber (material) gardening (purpose)** gloves.
4. The **refined (condition) Chinese (nationality)** women waited for the server to come to their table.
5. The box was full of **black (color) and white (color) spotted (pattern)** puppies.*

*The two adjectives are part of a phrase, so they are separated by *and*.

For example, *They read the old **black and white** newspaper* or *They shop in the **big and tall** section of the store.*

6. The state of Colorado is **large (size), square (shape), and mountainous (condition/state)**.
7. Did you know that cheetahs are **beautiful (opinion), carnivorous (state/condition), and endangered (state/condition)**?
8. The **green (color) Swedish (nationality)** furniture was sold yesterday.