Adverbs

An adverb is a word that describes or modifies either a verb, an adjective, or another adverb by asking questions like:

• When?
• Where?
• Why?
• How?
• To what extent?
• Under what condition?

Here are some examples of sentences with adverbs:

• Bill walked cautiously around the sinkhole.
• She looked first for a place to sit.
• Dr. Brown was extremely distraught when he heard the news.

In the first sentence, “cautiously” is an adverb that modifies the verb “walked” by telling us how Bill walked. In the second sentence, “first” is an adverb that clarifies the verb “looked” by revealing when she looked for a place to eat. In the third sentence, “extremely” is an adverb that modifies the adjective “distraught” by describing to what extent Dr. Brown was distraught.

Sometimes, it can be tough to tell whether a particular word is an adjective or an adverb. **In those cases, remember that adverbs do NOT describe nouns or pronouns. Instead, they describe verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs.**

Here’s an example:

• *In front of the audience, the magician looked nervous.*

When looking at sentence one, decide whether “nervous” is describing the noun (“magician”) OR elaborating on the verb (“looked”). If “nervous” is describing the noun, then it’s an adjective. If “nervous” is describing the verb, then it’s an adverb.

**Ask yourself:**

Does the magician appear to be nervous?

OR:

Is the magician looking at others in a nervous manner?
In this example, “nervous” is an adjective because it modifies the noun “magician” by describing the appearance of the magician, instead of telling us how the magician looks at the audience (i.e., *The magician looked nervously at the audience*).