

Really, Truly Helpful: Understanding Gradable and Non-gradable Adjectives

Directions for the teacher:

STEP 1 – Ask students to write down five adjectives that describe who they are and what they are like. Give them a model list of words that identify and describe you. Example:

Jennifer – *American, married, calm, organized, creative*

STEP 2 – Have students share their lists with a partner. Ask them to identify which adjectives could be used with adverbs like *very* or *generally*.

STEP 3 – As a class, discuss why only some adjectives could be preceded by “very” or “generally.” Elicit different ideas.

STEP 4 – Do Task A as a class. Answers:

List A	List B
Terri is kind of short , but Lucy is much shorter .	I had a Chinese roommate last year, and this year I’m rooming with a Canadian.
Eight is young , but they were looking for an even younger actor.	Her entire wardrobe consists of jeans and t-shirts with various sayings.
You don’t really have a bad attitude, but it could be more positive .	Hector treats everyone with the same degree of respect and kindness.
His taste in clothing is a little odd , but Nancy’s choices are awfully strange .	Some people worry too much about social status.

Have the class determine the main difference between the two groups of adjectives. Answer: List A has **descriptive** adjectives, which are gradable (can be expressed with degrees). List B has **classifying** adjectives, which are non-gradable (and generally are not expressed in degrees).

STEP 4 – Do Task B as a class. Answers:

List A
Terri is <u>kind of</u> short , but Lucy is <u>much</u> shorter . Eight is young , but they were looking for an <u>even</u> younger actor. You don’t really have a bad attitude, but it could be more positive . His taste in clothing is <u>a little</u> odd , but Nancy’s choices are <u>awfully</u> strange .

STEP 5 – Have students do Task C. They can use some of the adjectives from Step 1 to write their sentences. Final texts can be read aloud to a partner. Adverbs from List A can be added to the box.

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[Task A.]

Circle all the adjectives.

List A	List B
Terri is kind of short, but Lucy is much shorter.	I had a Chinese roommate last year, and this year I'm rooming with a Canadian.
Eight is young, but they were looking for an even younger actor.	Her entire wardrobe consists of jeans and t-shirts with various sayings.
You don't really have a bad attitude, but it could be more positive.	Hector treats everyone with the same degree of respect and kindness.
His taste in clothing is a little odd, but Nancy's choices are awfully strange.	Some people worry too much about social status.

How are the adjectives in List A different from those in List B?

[Task B.]

Look back at the sentences in Task A, List A. Which words or word forms explain *how much* or *to what degree*? Underline them.

[Task C.]

Create a description of yourself using at least two adjectives that describe you (*creative, athletic*) and two adjectives that classify you (*American, married*). Include some of the adverbs from the box below.

More				Less
a bit	fairly	really	totally	rather
absolutely	extremely	so		slightly
completely	more	too		somewhat
