

## 20 Order of adjectives; stronger and weaker meanings



### 1 Order of adjectives

We sometimes put more than one adjective in front of a noun. We put 'opinion' adjectives (what we think, not facts), e.g. *amazing*, *boring*, *comfortable*, before others:

Look at these **amazing** multi-coloured tropical fish.

I love my **comfortable** old leather **armchair**.

We put adjectives describing type or purpose (what something is for) next to the noun.

These adjectives are often part of the noun (► Unit 98.1):

*Amazing* multi-coloured **tropical fish**. (= type of fish)

*A long steel* **hunting knife**. (= knife used for hunting)

When we use other adjectives we usually put them in this order:

| opinion             | size         | shape        | age             | colour     | origin         | material    | type/purpose   | NOUN          |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|
| (a) <i>valuable</i> | <i>large</i> | <i>round</i> |                 |            | <i>Italian</i> |             | <i>bedroom</i> | <i>mirror</i> |
|                     |              |              | (an) <i>old</i> | <i>red</i> |                | <i>silk</i> | <i>wedding</i> | <i>dress</i>  |

We don't usually use more than three or four adjectives in front of a noun. If we want to give more information we use another clause or sentence:

~~X My uncle has a really valuable large old black Italian sports car.~~

✓ My uncle has a large black Italian sports car, which is old and really valuable.

### 2 Making adjectives stronger or weaker

We can use adverbs of degree, e.g. *really*, to make most adjectives stronger or weaker:

'I think they're *beautiful*.' 'Yes, I think they're **really beautiful**.' (stronger meaning).

'That film was *boring*.' 'Well, it was **slightly boring**, but some parts were OK.' (weaker meaning)

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| WEAKER ←                       | → STRONGER  |
| <i>a little/a bit/slightly</i> | <i>fairly quite rather/pretty very really extremely</i> |

- We don't use *a little* and *a bit* with adjectives which come before a noun:  
~~X I bought a bit expensive watch.~~ ✓ The watch I bought was **a bit expensive**.
- We often use *rather* with negative adjectives: It's **rather cold** today. She's **rather bossy**.
- When we use *quite* or *rather* with positive adjectives it often means something is surprising: That lesson was **rather interesting**. (more interesting than I expected)
- When a noun follows *quite/rather* + adjective we add *a/an*:  
 He was quite nice. → He was **quite a nice** person.  
 That's rather expensive. → That's **rather an expensive** hotel.

**FORMALITY CHECK** We don't usually use *a bit* or *pretty* in formal English:

~~X The flight to Malaga will be a bit late due to bad weather.~~

✓ The flight to Malaga will be **slightly late** due to bad weather.