

12 Adjective patterns

After a spate of vandalism in Spornnton, the police have reassured **concerned residents** that the **persons responsible** will be caught and punished.



1 Adjectives before nouns (attributive position)

Most adjectives can be used before a noun (attributive position), or after a linking verb, e.g. *be, become*, etc. (predicative position):

ATTRIBUTIVE *We've just seen an **exciting** film.*

PREDICATIVE *That film was **exciting**.*

But classifying adjectives (which describe what type of thing something is) and emphasising adjectives are normally only used BEFORE a noun:

✗ *The ~~plant they are building here~~ is ~~chemical~~.* ✓ *They're building a **chemical plant** here.*

✗ *The ~~chance that they met was mere~~.* ✓ *It was **mere chance** that they met.*

ATTRIBUTIVE POSITION

classifying (examples)	<i>chemical chief criminal elder entire eventual former industrial local lone main maximum medical national nuclear only outdoor/indoor principal social sole underlying whole</i>
emphasising	<i>mere sheer utter</i>

ACADEMIC ENGLISH In academic writing we usually prefer adjectives in attributive position, e.g. *basic processes, experimental physics, appropriate conditions, principal causes*, etc.

2 Adjectives after verbs (predicative position)

Adjectives in predicative position are usually the complement of a linking verb, e.g. *be, become, feel, seem* (► Unit 42.1): *When she heard the noise Mary **became** very **uneasy**.*

However, after certain verbs of thinking and feeling (i.e. *consider, find, think*) we can omit the linking verb: *I **consider/find** him (to be) very **reliable**.*

Many adjectives beginning with the letter *a* and adjectives describing health and feelings are not usually used before nouns; instead, we use them in predicative position:

✗ *Try not to ~~disturb the asleep children~~.* ✓ *Try not to disturb the children; they are **asleep**.*

PREDICATIVE POSITION

beginning with a	<i>ablaze aflame afloat afoot afraid alight alike alive alone aloof ashamed askew asleep awake aware</i>
health and feelings	<i>content fine glad ill* pleased poorly ready* sorry* sure* upset* (un)well</i>

* There are some fixed phrases/idioms in which we use normally predicative adjectives before a noun with a special meaning, e.g. *a sure grasp, ill health, a ready wit, a sorry state, an upset stomach*.

Some predicative adjectives have equivalent words which can be used before a noun:

PREDICATIVE	<i>alive</i>	<i>afraid</i>	<i>alike</i>	<i>asleep</i>	<i>ill</i>
ATTRIBUTIVE	<i>live/living</i>	<i>frightened</i>	<i>similar</i>	<i>sleeping</i>	<i>sick</i>

*They are doing experiments on **live** animals/animals which are **alive**.*