

We often use less common adverbs to intensify certain gradable adjectives:
*I was **bitterly disappointed** at my exam results. My brother is **painfully shy**.
 The students in this school are **highly intelligent**.*

But note that we can often only use certain adverbs with certain adjectives.

Common adverb + adjective collocations ► page 369

3 Weakening gradable adjectives

Gradable adjectives can usually be made weaker by the words *fairly*, *slightly*, *a (little) bit* (informal) and *somewhat* (formal):

*I've been feeling **slightly dizzy** all morning.*

*My friend was **a bit upset**.* (informal)

*The police reported that the man was **somewhat aggressive**.* (formal)

We can use *not very* and *not at all* to weaken gradable adjectives after the verb *be*:

*The end of term test **wasn't very long** and it **wasn't at all difficult**.*

With gradable adjectives *quite* usually means 'fairly' but can have other meanings, depending on stress and intonation:

The lecture was quite interesting. (unmarked: fairly interesting)

The lecture was quite interesting. (stressed adjective: more interesting than the speaker expected)

The lecture was quite interesting. (stressed adverb: less interesting than the speaker expected)



Pronunciation ► 1.04

4 Intensifying ungradable adjectives

A common way to intensify the meaning of ungradable adjectives is with the adverb *absolutely*. We often use this device to add emphasis in informal English:

*I couldn't swim in the sea; the water was **absolutely freezing**.*

*The show was **absolutely fabulous**.*



We do not usually use *very* with ungradable adjectives:

~~✗ Entrance to the museum is very free.~~ ✓ Entrance to the museum is **absolutely free**.

When we use *quite* with ungradable adjectives, it has a similar meaning to 'completely', emphasising the strength of the adjective. In speech the stress is usually on *quite*:

*The tenor's performance was **quite amazing**. You're **quite correct**.*

We can also use *a most* before an ungradable adjective + noun:

*Hilary has **a most amazing hairstyle**.* (= Her hairstyle is completely amazing.)

Although we use *absolutely* with many ungradable adjectives, there are some adjectives where we prefer to use other intensifying adverbs such as *completely*, *totally* and *utterly*.

There are no grammar rules which explain these combinations so it is best to learn them as vocabulary items (► page 369).

*I'm afraid your answer is **completely wrong**.*

*Since the accident Henry has been **totally deaf** in one ear.*

*Susan was **utterly appalled** by her husband's dishonesty.*

5 Weakening ungradable adjectives (*almost*, *nearly*, etc.)

We use *almost*, *nearly*, *practically* or *virtually* to indicate a point close to the absolute meaning of ungradable adjectives:

*He never turns the heating on – it's **practically freezing** in there.*

*The battery in my calculator is **almost dead**.*

*After six months with the disease he was **nearly deaf** and **virtually blind**.*



We do not usually use the modifiers *fairly*, *slightly*, *a (little) bit*, *somewhat* or *not very* with ungradable adjectives:

~~✗ Their favourite possession is a slightly priceless Satsuma vase.~~

~~✗ I wouldn't recommend the show; it's not very fabulous.~~