

Adding Words to Sentences

Simple sentences can be expanded by adding more adjectives and adverbs. Adjectives are used to describe nouns; adverbs are used to describe verbs, adjectives, and even other adverbs.

Here are five sentences that will be expanded:

1. Students at Cuyamaca College read books.
2. George bought a car, but he prefers to drive a truck.
3. Although the party ended early, Fran washed dishes, so she got to bed late.
4. Above the house a tree waved its branches in the moonlight.
5. After working all day, Claire heard the bus laboring up the road, and she stuffed her shirts into a bag.

Here are the same sentences with some added adjectives, which are underlined:

1. All hard working, intelligent students at Cuyamaca College read helpful, well-written books.
2. George bought a red sports car, but prefers to drive an old, beat-up truck.
3. Although the noisy birthday party ended early, Fran washed all the greasy dishes, so she got to her nice, warm bed late.
4. Above the decrepit, old stone house a giant eucalyptus tree waved its dripping branches in the mysterious moonlight.
5. After working all day, an exhausted Claire heard the old gray bus laboring up the steep mountain road, and she stuffed all her four ugly tattered shirts into a black plastic bag.

Now some adverbs, which are underlined, are added to the sentences:

1. Almost all hard working, intelligent students at Cuyamaca College thoroughly read the often helpful, wonderfully well-written books.
2. George recently bought a red sports car, but still much prefers to drive an old, beat-up truck.
3. Although the extremely noisy birthday party ended quite early, Fran sullenly washed all the greasy dishes, so she got to her nice, warm bed very late.
4. Above the decrepit, old stone house a giant eucalyptus tree endlessly waved its dripping branches in the mysterious moonlight.
5. After working energetically all day, an exhausted Claire heard the old gray bus laboring slowly up the steep mountain road, and she quickly stuffed all her four ugly tattered shirts into a black plastic bag.

Notice that in some cases, several adjectives describing the same noun are separated by commas, but at other times they are not separated. If the sentence still makes sense if you place the word "and" between the adjectives, use a comma in place of the "and." If the sentence does not make sense, do not use the commas. This is because a string of adjectives sometimes forms a progression in English, with each adjective modifying the entire word group that follows. In these cases, it is not desirable to separate the adjectives. For example, in sentence #5, the phrase "all *and* her *and* four *and* ugly *and* tattered shirts" does not make much sense, but in sentence #2, "old *and* beat-up truck" does make sense, even if it sounds awkward. Therefore commas are used in the latter group: "old, beat-up, rusted truck." Let your ear be your guide.

This is a typical progression of adjectives: definitive (the, a, this, that, etc.); numerical (two, three, etc.); adjectives of opinion (beautiful, ugly, etc.); and descriptive (furry, rusted, etc.).