

Gradable and Ungradable Adjectives Explanation

Gradable adjectives

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Most adjectives are gradable. We can make the adjective stronger or weaker and we can talk about different levels of meaning. It's also natural to make comparatives and superlatives with gradable adjectives. We change the strength of the adjective using words like *very* or *extremely*. For example:

- The book was good. (Normal meaning)
- The book was *very good*. (Stronger meaning)
- I'm sad. (Normal meaning)
- I'm *extremely sad*. (Stronger meaning)

Here are some adverbs that we can use with gradable adjectives:

To make the meaning strong	very, incredibly, extremely, terribly, awfully	- It's <i>very</i> cold today.
		- She's incredibly tired.
		- That book was <i>extremely</i> interesting.
		- The film was <i>terribly</i> long.
		- It's <i>awfully</i> hot in here.
To make the meaning medium	quite, rather, fairly, pretty	- He's <i>quite</i> tall.
		- The exam was rather difficult.
		- It's fairly expensive.
		- That's <i>pretty</i> good news.
To make the meaning weak	a bit, a little, slightly	- She's <i>a bit</i> tired.
		- The soup is <i>a little</i> salty.
		- I'm <i>slightly</i> annoyed.



Ungradable adjectives

Some adjectives are ungradable. They have strong meanings already. They include words like **fantastic**, **terrible**, **delighted** and **devastated**. We don't think about someone as being a little bit devastated – they are just devastated or not devastated.

However, we still sometimes want to emphasise the meaning, and we can use adverbs like absolutely, totally, truly and completely with ungradable adjectives.

Here are some adverbs we can use with ungradable adjectives.

Strong emphasis	absolutely, completely, totally,
Strong emphasis	utterly, truly, entirely

- It's *absolutely* freezing outside.
- I'm *completely* exhausted.
- That's totally impossible.
- She was utterly delighted.
- I'm *truly* devastated.
- I'm *entirely* confident in your decision.

What's the difference?

Generally, we can use really, so and too with both gradable and ungradable adjectives.

- I am so tired. (correct)
- I am so exhausted. (correct)
- You look *really* beautiful. (correct)
- You look really stunning. (correct)

However, we don't use *very* with ungradable adjectives, and we don't use *absolutely* with gradable adjectives. Look at this example:

• NOT: The wedding was very perfect.

We don't say 'very perfect' because 'perfect' is ungradable. Instead, we can say 'absolutely perfect' if we want to add emphasis.



Here's another example.

• NOT: I am very exhausted.

We don't say 'very exhausted' because 'exhausted' is ungradable. Instead, we say 'very tired' (because 'tired' is gradable), or 'absolutely exhausted' (because 'exhausted' is ungradable).

In a similar way, we don't usually use *absolutely, totally, truly,* and *completely* with gradable adjectives. Look at these examples:

• NOT: I'm completely tired.

Instead, we say: I'm very tired. OR I'm completely exhausted.

• NOT: That film was totally good.

Instead, we say: That film was very good. OR That film was totally amazing.

• NOT: He felt absolutely cold.

Instead, we say: He felt very cold. OR He felt absolutely freezing.

Here is a list of gradable and ungradable adjectives:

Gradable adjectives	Ungradable adjectives
Gradabic adjectives	ongradable adjectives

small tiny

good excellent, fantastic, wonderful, brilliant

happy **delighted, thrilled, overjoyed**

big enormous, gigantic, huge

tired exhausted, shattered

sad devastated, heartbroken

bad awful, terrible, dreadful, atrocious

cold freezing, icy

hot boiling, scorching

interesting fascinating, captivating

hungry starving, ravenous, famished

beautiful gorgeous, stunning

funny hilarious

angry furious, seething wet soaked, drenched

tasty **delicious**



In summary, we can use:

- Gradable adjectives with very, extremely, incredibly, terribly, awfully, quite, rather, fairly, pretty, a bit, a little, slightly.
- Ungradable adjectives with *absolutely, completely, totally, utterly, entirely, truly.*
- Generally, really, so, too with both.