



A question from Pasan in Sri Lanka:

I tried to answer latest Quiznet programme on your site of adjective order. I found it a bit tricky and difficult, so could you please give me any help of this matter.

and from Belen:

May I ask which the correct order in adjectives is?

Catherine Chapman answers:

Hi Pasan and hello Belen!

When we use two or more adjectives together to describe a noun, the order we put them in is quite important. For example, we don't usually say *an old Indian beautiful carpet*. It sounds much better say *a beautiful old Indian carpet*.

As a general rule, adjectives are usually placed in this order:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
opinion	size	quality	age	shape	colour	participle forms	origin	material	type	purpose

opinion à size à quality à age à shape à colour à participle forms à origin à material type à purpose

The phrase *a beautiful old Indian carpet* follows these guidelines:

	3	4	8	
	quality	age	origin	noun
a	beautiful	old	Indian	carpet

You don't have to include an example of every type of adjective, but the ones you do use should follow the order. So if you wanted to add *red and green* to the phrase *a beautiful old Indian carpet*, you would put it between *old* and *Indian* like this:

	1	4	6	8	
	opinion	age	colour	origin	noun
a	beautiful	old	red and green	Indian	carpet

It sometimes helps to remember the order of adjective if you consider that adjectives whose meaning is closely, or permanently, connected to the noun are placed nearer to it in the sentence. So in this phrase: *a large comfortable wooden chair* – *wooden* has a very close connection with *chair*.

	2	3	10	
	size	quality	material	noun
a	large	comfortable	wooden	chair

Here are some more examples:

	3	7	
	quality	participle	noun
a	new	improved	recipe

	1	3	10	
	opinion	quality	type	noun
an	old-fashioned	romantic	candle-lit	dinner for two

Sometimes we can use *but* between adjectives, especially if their meanings seem contradictory.

	2		3	
	size		quality	noun
a	small	but	tasty	meal

If we use 2 adjectives that are similar in meaning, we usually put the shorter one first: *a soft, comfortable cushion*.

I hope that's answered your interesting English questions, Pasan and Belen!

Catherine Chapman has a BA (hons) in Communication Studies, CTEFLA, DELTA and a Masters Degree in Educational Technology and English Language Teaching with Manchester University (UK). She has taught EFL, EAP and IT skills in several countries, worked in ELT management and has developed web-based ELT/EAP materials projects in institutions including Istanbul Technical University (Turkey) and Newcastle University (UK). She now works as an ELT Writer for BBC Learning English.