

adverb position (1)

Adverb position depends on the type of adverb, and some adverbs can go in more than one position. Usage in this area is complicated; general tendencies are as follows. For fuller information, consult a comprehensive reference grammar or usage guide.

Connecting adverbs and comment adverbs usually come at the beginning of a clause. Connecting adverbs join a clause to what came before; comment adverbs give the speaker's opinion.

Then they went home. *Next*, we need to look at costs. *However*, James disagreed.
Stupidly, I forgot to thank Maggie. *Fortunately* nobody noticed the mistake.

Maybe and *perhaps* also usually come at the beginning.

Maybe you're right. *Perhaps* we should think again.

Focusing (emphasising) adverbs most often go with the verb if they emphasise words later in the sentence.

They're *even* open *today*. I've *only* been here *a month*.

But they can also go **before** the words that they emphasise.

They're open *even today*. I've been here *only a month*.

1 Rewrite the sentences with a more normal order.

- ▶ We play only on Saturdays. *We only play on Saturdays.*
- 1 He wears a hat even in bed.
- 2 I wanted only to help you.
- 3 He believes even in ghosts.
- 4 My French is worse even than yours.
- 5 It's open only to members.
- 6 I forgot even to phone home.
- 7 I sing only on special occasions.
- 8 He's there only in office hours.

Expressions that say how, where and when most often go at the end; usually in that order.

They played *brilliantly in Coventry on Saturday*.

Pam works *in London on Wednesdays*. (NOT ~~Pam works on Wednesdays in London.~~)

I'm going *to bed early*. (NOT ~~I'm going early to bed.~~)

We do **not** normally put these adverbs **between a verb and its object**.

You speak *Japanese very well*. (NOT ~~You speak very well Japanese.~~)

Let's discuss the budget *now*. (NOT ~~Let's discuss now the budget.~~)

2 Show where the adverbs should go.

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|---|---|
| ▶ They were talking <i>in the corner</i> . (<i>quietly</i>) | 5 Please put these on the top shelf. (<i>carefully</i>) |
| 1 I think <i>in the bath</i> . (<i>best</i>) | 6 I'm playing golf <i>in Scotland</i> . (<i>at the weekend</i>) |
| 2 I never worked <i>at university</i> . (<i>very hard</i>) | 7 Please take the cat out of here. (<i>at once</i>) |
| 3 He wrote his best novels. (<i>in the 1960s</i>) | 8 Jennie sang <i>at Harry's wedding</i> . (<i>beautifully</i>) |
| 4 We're having a meeting <i>on Tuesday</i> . (<i>here</i>) | |

NOTES

Adverbs of place and time can go at the beginning for emphasis.

In Germany they do things quite differently. *On Monday* I'll be back home.

After verbs of movement, we often put an **expression of place** first.

They went outside slowly.

adverb position (2): with the verb

Adverbs that go in mid-position, with the verb, mostly express **indefinite frequency** (e.g. *always, often*), **certainty** (e.g. *definitely, probably*) or **completeness** (e.g. *partly, completely*). Their exact position is usually:

- **before** one-word verbs – **after** the first auxiliary in more complex verbs
- **after** *am, are, is, was* and *were* even if these are not auxiliaries.

I completely forgot to phone Maggie. *Annie has definitely decided to leave.*
They should never have been invited. *John is usually at home in the evenings.*

1 CHECK YOUR KNOWLEDGE. Show where the adverbs should go.

- ▶ I have admired Joe's self-confidence. (*always*)
- 1 People like Joe know best. (*always*)
- 2 They have made a mistake in their lives, it seems. (*never*)
- 3 Or at least, they will admit that they have made one. (*never*)
- 4 They are calm and happy. (*usually*)
- 5 They tell us, very kindly, how to run our lives. (*often*)
- 6 Because they know better than we do. (*invariably*)
- 7 This is because they are right. (*always*)
- 8 The only trouble is, they are wrong. (*nearly always*)

with not Adverbs can come before or after *not*, depending on the meaning. Compare:

I don't really like her. (mild dislike) *I really don't like her.* (strong dislike)
She does not always welcome visitors. *He's probably not at home.*

emphatic position These adverbs can often be put earlier when verbs are emphasised.

He has certainly forgotten. (normal) *He certainly HAS forgotten.* (emphatic)

2 Circle the expression that has the most normal order.

- 1 I will probably not / will not probably be in the office tomorrow.
- 2 The train is certainly / certainly is going to be late.
- 3 We can definitely / definitely can give you some help.
- 4 Tina's always not / not always so bad-tempered.
- 5 I'm sorry, but I'm definitely not / not definitely interested in your proposition.
- 6 Don't worry – it doesn't matter. Honestly, it really doesn't / doesn't really matter.
- 7 The building work is completely not / not completely finished, I'm afraid.
- 8 Emily is often not / not often depressed, but she's having a bad week.

NOTES

American English Earlier positions are common in American English.

He probably has arrived by now. (BrE emphatic; AmE normal)

other positions Some adverbs of indefinite frequency can also go at the beginning of sentences (e.g. *often, occasionally, sometimes*).

Sometimes I wonder what it's all about. *Occasionally we have a weekend at home.*

This is not possible with *always* and *never* except in imperatives. (See page 10.)

He always forgets. (NOT *Always he ...*) BUT *Always think.* (NOT *Think always ...*)

Adverbs never normally separate the verb from the object.

We often speak Spanish at home. (NOT *We speak often Spanish at home.*)