Position of adverbs

I. Three positions

II. Adverbs used in one, two or all three positions

III. Position of adverbs of manner, place and time in one sentence

I. Three positions of adverbs

1. Front

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gradually,</td>
<td>he</td>
<td>changed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Mid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
<th>Main verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They</td>
<td>always</td>
<td>speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“be”</td>
<td>Adverb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We</td>
<td>almost</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auxiliary</td>
<td>Adverb</td>
<td>Main verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>have</td>
<td>never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She</td>
<td>will</td>
<td>probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This</td>
<td>can</td>
<td>hardly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

- With main verbs, the adverb comes before the verb:
  They always speak English.

- With “be”, it comes after the verb:
  We are almost ready.

- With auxiliaries and modals, it is placed after the auxiliary/modal (between the auxiliary/modal and the main verb):
  I have never said that.
  She will probably join us.
  This can hardly be true.

If there are two auxiliaries or a modal and an auxiliary, the adverb is placed after the first verb:

The experiment has always been done like this.
They may never have used this method.

3. End

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He</td>
<td>spoke</td>
<td>about his plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She</td>
<td>has been attending</td>
<td>the English class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:

Below you will find some basic guidelines and examples of usage. You should, however, be aware that there may be several options, depending on what the speaker wants to put
emphasis on. Neither the rules nor the examples pretend to be exhaustive. Remember that the positions listed here may not be suitable in all contexts. In some cases, the position of the adverb may also modify its meaning. Nevertheless, there is no need to despair: through intensive reading of English texts and listening to native speakers you will develop a feeling for these words and their place in the sentence.

II. Adverbs used in one, two or all three positions

1. Adverbs used mostly in mid position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>frequency</th>
<th>always, ever, hardly ever, never, often, rarely, seldom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>degree</td>
<td>almost, hardly, nearly, quite, scarcely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>probability</td>
<td>certainly, definitely, probably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time</td>
<td>just</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

He has **never** attended an international conference.
I **quite** understand what you mean.
He is **probably** back.

2. Adverbs used mostly in front or mid position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>frequency/time</th>
<th>sometimes, usually; eventually, finally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I **sometimes** work till late at night.
**Sometimes,** I work till late at night.

3. Adverbs used mostly in mid or end position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>frequency</th>
<th>constantly, continuously, regularly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>degree</td>
<td>completely, entirely, greatly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time</td>
<td>already, lately, recently</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The temperature was **constantly** rising.
The temperature was rising **constantly**.
I **completely** agree with you.
I agree with you **completely**.

4. Adverbs used mostly in end or front position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>place</th>
<th>above, here, there, at home, upstairs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>time/frequency</td>
<td>in January, last year; as a rule, from time to time, once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>probability</td>
<td>maybe, perhaps</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
- With adverbs of place, time and frequency, the end position is more common; the **front position** is used to give importance or draw attention to the adverb:
  - You will find a more detailed description below.
  - **Below** you will find a more detailed description.
I offered him help once, but he refused it.

Once I offered him help, but he refused it.

I started to learn English last year.

Last year, I started to learn English.

- With maybe and perhaps, the front position is more common.
  Perhaps, you should ask him for help.

5. Adverbs used in any of the three positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>manner</th>
<th>briefly, carefully, easily, quickly, slowly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>time/frequency</td>
<td>now, soon, immediately, suddenly; occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aspect</td>
<td>economically, financially, logically, scientifically, technically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>probability</td>
<td>apparently, certainly, clearly, evidently, obviously</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Manner: In this chapter we briefly examine the latest developments in ... .
  Briefly, I think we should join this project. (in brief)
  Let me describe briefly how we arrived at this conclusion.
  He explained the situation briefly.
  Not: He explained briefly the situation.
  If the verb has an object, the adverb comes after the object.
  Only when the object is long, the adverb may precede it:
  We considered briefly our next steps in that unexpected situation.

Time: The situation suddenly changed.
  The situation changed suddenly.
  Suddenly, the situation changed.
  The mid position is the most common. The end position draws attention to the adverb. The front position is the least common; it is used to raise interest in what is coming next.

Aspect: Technically, this is no problem.
  This is no problem, technically.
  This is, technically, no problem.
  The end and front positions are the most common.

Probability: This is obviously a mistake.
  This is a mistake, obviously.
  Obviously, this is a mistake.

6. Adverbs used mostly in front position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>comment/opinion</th>
<th>admittedly, evidently, hopefully, naturally, surprisingly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sentence linkers</td>
<td>however, consequently, as a result, nevertheless</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment/opinion: Surprisingly, the experiment did not fail.
  Sometimes these adverbs may also come in mid position:
  He was evidently nervous.
**Sentence linkers:** *This is a simple and safe procedure. However, you should not underestimate the risk.*

See also Guidelines for Academic Writing: Text structure (Sentence linkers).

Note the use of commas before and after the adverb in some cases. For more information see Guidelines for Academic Writing: Punctuation.

**III. Position of adverbs of manner, place, and time in one sentence**

**Normal position**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Manner</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He worked</td>
<td>very hard</td>
<td></td>
<td>last semester.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn´t</td>
<td></td>
<td>in that conference</td>
<td>last year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He explained</td>
<td>thoroughly</td>
<td>at the seminar</td>
<td>last week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that problem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The position can be changed in order to

- emphasize/draw attention to one adverb: *Last year I didn´t participate in that conference.*
- avoid putting the longest adverb in the middle: *I lived quite happily for one year in one of the remotest places in the world.*
- avoid placing too many adverbs in the end position: *In the mountains it is dangerous to drive quickly in winter.*

See also A Remedial Course in English Grammar: Word order (Statements).

**EXERCISES**

I. Tick the place where you would put the adverbs in bold type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>has</th>
<th>occurred</th>
<th>to me.</th>
<th>never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td>appreciated</td>
<td>his help.</td>
<td>always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He</td>
<td>lost</td>
<td>his job</td>
<td>last year.</td>
<td>nearly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>forgot</td>
<td>to tell you</td>
<td>about the change.</td>
<td>completely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He</td>
<td>could</td>
<td>have done</td>
<td>anything else.</td>
<td>hardly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lab</td>
<td>is</td>
<td>open</td>
<td>all night.</td>
<td>often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>been</td>
<td>to England?</td>
<td>ever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He</td>
<td>has</td>
<td>returned</td>
<td>from abroad.</td>
<td>just</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>see</td>
<td>him</td>
<td>these days.</td>
<td>rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We</td>
<td>expected</td>
<td>him</td>
<td>to be there on time.</td>
<td>certainly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She</td>
<td>is</td>
<td>at home</td>
<td>in the evening.</td>
<td>hardly ever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>complaining</td>
<td>about something.</td>
<td>constantly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>slept</td>
<td>the night</td>
<td>before the exam.</td>
<td>hardly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. In which positions are the adverbs most likely to be used? Tick their numbers.
In some cases there are more options than one.
1. We have 1) made 2) some radical changes 3).
   (already)
2. 1) The discussion 2) takes 3) one hour.
   (usually)
3. 1) He 2) helps us 3) with the experiments 4).
   (sometimes)
4. The world 1) is 2) changing 3).
   (constantly)
5. 1) They 2) agreed 3) on the higher education reform 4).
   (finally)
6. They 1) discussed 2) the issue 3).
   (thoroughly)
7. 1) The problem will 2) be 3) solved by tomorrow 4).
   (hopefully)
8. 1) The spring semester 2) ends 3) at the end of May 4).
   (as a rule)
9. 1) I 2) could 3) help you 4).
   (maybe)
10. 1) They 2) discussed 3) the differences between the calculated and measured values 4).
    (thoroughly)

III. Put the adverbs in the position which is the most likely in the given context.
1. regularly
   a) Accidents …………………… occur ………………………. at this crossing. (= usually)
   b) They …………………….. meet …………………….. every three months.

2. greatly
   a) The prices ……………………… varied …………………………… .
   b) I ………………………. admired his courage …………………………. .

3. completely
   a) I ………………………… forgot ………………………… to tell you about the change.
   b) If you can´t ………………………. trust him ………………………., don´t let him handle the grant.

4. soon
   a) We didn´t have to persuade him. He …………………. decided to join our team ………………. .
   b) He ……………………. decided to join our team …………………………. as he was very much interested in our project.

5. once
   a) We have ……………………….. met …………………….. before.  (= one time; jednou, jedenkrát)
   b) He …………………….. told us ………………………. about his life in Africa. (= at some point in the past; jednou, kdysi)

IV. Put the adverbs listed below in different positions in the sentences. Explain in what situations the speaker/writer might use the different options.
1. The lecture was over. John left the room.
   immediately

2. He pressed the button.
   carefully
3. That conclusion is wrong. apparently

4. Their argument makes sense. logically

5. He entered the room. slowly

6. Such behaviour isn’t acceptable. socially

V. Complete the sentences. Use the words and phrases in brackets and put them in the most likely non-emphatic positions.

1. The students waited for the Dean … /for half an hour, patiently, in the secretary´s office/

2. Don’t take what he says. /seriously/

3. He will be …. /late/today/probably/

4. We discussed this problem … /at the seminar/last/on Monday/

5. The exam requirements will remain the same … /this year/hopefully/

6. He sits … . /for two hours/every evening/usually/at his computer/

7. She has done … /well/in maths/this semester/really/

8. Read your paper … before mailing it. /at least/carefully/twice.

9. She is coming … /on Monday morning/certainly/to the lecture/

10. He stays … /in the evening/hardly ever/at home/