Using Adjectives

- Present/Past Participles

Both the present and past participle forms of verbs may be used as adjectives.

Here are some examples of present participles:

- surprising, exciting, terrifying

Present participles always end in –ing.

Here are some examples of past participles:

- surprised, excited, terrified

Past participles most commonly end in –ed, but can also end in –d, -t, -en, or –n.

When used as adjectives, participles can come before the noun they modify, or they can follow both the noun and a linking verb.

- It was an exciting class.
- The class was exciting.
- The terrified teacher ran out of the room.
- The teacher was terrified and ran out of the room.

Problems most commonly occur when choosing to use either the past or present participle. To avoid such problems, we must keep two very simple ideas in mind. First, remember that a present participle can only describe a person or thing causing an experience.

INCORRECT: The roller coaster ride was excited.

CORRECT: The roller coaster ride was exciting.
Roller coaster rides do not have feelings; rather, they cause them.

A past participle can only describe a person or thing undergoing an experience. The riders of the roller coaster may cause excitement, but we want to talk about how they were made to feel.

INCORRECT: The exciting riders of the roller coaster could not stop giggling.

CORRECT: The excited roller coaster riders could not stop giggling.

• Cumulative Adjectives

Cumulative adjectives cannot be linked by the word and, nor can they be separated by commas. They must follow a specific order, as follows:

FIRST
   Evaluative Word - beautiful, ugly, tasty, stinky
NEXT
   Size - enormous, miniscule, gigantic, tiny
NEXT
   Length or Shape - long, short, round, square
NEXT
   Age - new, young, antique, ancient
NEXT
   Color - crimson, white, gray, adobe
NEXT
   Nationality - Jordanian, Argentine, Portuguese
NEXT
   Religion - Buddhist, Muslim, Mormon, Jain
NEXT
   Material - teak, cotton, granite, aluminum
LAST
   Noun/Adjective - sports (as in sports-car)
I love driving around in my beautiful enormous antique crimson Italian steel sports-car.