What are Extreme Adjectives?

“Cold” is a regular adjective, and “Freezing” is an extreme adjective.

Adjectives are words that describe the qualities of something. Some adjectives in English are gradable - that means you can have different degrees or levels of that quality. For example, the weather can be a little cold, rather cold, very cold, or extremely cold.

Extreme adjectives or non-gradable adjectives are words that mean “extremely + adjective” – for example, “freezing” means “extremely cold.” The weather can’t be “a little bit freezing” or “very freezing” – because the word “freezing” itself automatically means “extremely cold.”

Regular & Extreme Adjectives List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regular Adjective</th>
<th>Extreme Adjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>angry</td>
<td>furious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bad</td>
<td>awful, terrible, horrible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>big</td>
<td>huge, gigantic, giant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clean</td>
<td>spotless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cold</td>
<td>freezing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crowded</td>
<td>packed</td>
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<tr>
<td>dirty</td>
<td>filthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>funny</td>
<td>hilarious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>wonderful, fantastic, excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hot</td>
<td>boiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hungry</td>
<td>starving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interesting</td>
<td>fascinating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>old</td>
<td>ancient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pretty</td>
<td>gorgeous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scary</td>
<td>terrifying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small</td>
<td>tiny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>surprising</td>
<td>astounding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tired</td>
<td>exhausted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ugly</td>
<td>hideous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Special Rules for Extreme Adjectives

Source: http://www.espressoenglish.net/
1) No comparatives/superlatives.

With regular adjectives, we can use comparatives and superlatives to compare two or more things:

- My house is **big**.
- My neighbor’s house is **bigger** than mine. (comparative)
- My parents’ house is **the biggest** house on the street. (superlative)

With extreme adjectives, we don’t use comparatives and superlatives:

- My parents’ house is **enormous**.
- My parents’ house is **more enormous/the most enormous**.

2) Use different adverbs with extreme adjectives.

With regular adjectives, we can use these adverbs:

- a little, a bit, slightly, fairly, rather
- very, extremely, immensely, intensely, hugely

Examples:

- I’m **rather hungry**. / I’m **very hungry**.
- This room is **a bit dirty**. / This room is **extremely dirty**.
- We’re **a little tired**. / We’re **immensely tired**.

With extreme adjectives, we CANNOT use these adverbs:

- I’m **rather starving**. / I’m **extremely starving**.

However, there are other adverbs we can use to give additional emphasis to the extreme adjective:

- absolutely
- completely
- utterly

Examples:

- I’m **absolutely furious**.
- We’re **completely exhausted**.
- The movie was **utterly terrifying**.

The words **pretty** and **really** can be used with both regular and extreme adjectives:

- This room is **pretty dirty**. (regular)
- This room is **pretty filthy**. (extreme)

Source: http://www.espressoenglish.net/
The party is really crowded. (regular)
The party is really packed. (extreme)

**Absolute Adjectives**

Another type of **extreme adjective** is called an **“absolute” adjective**.

These are words that are either “yes or no.” For example, **dead** - you can’t be “a little bit dead” or “very dead” – either YES, you are dead, or NO, you’re not dead.

Here’s a list of absolute adjectives and their opposites (this list is not complete; it only shows some examples):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Absolute Adjective</th>
<th>Opposite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>complete</td>
<td>incomplete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equal</td>
<td>unequal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>essential</td>
<td>non-essential; extraneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dead</td>
<td>alive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fatal</td>
<td>not fatal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first</td>
<td>last / final</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full</td>
<td>empty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ideal</td>
<td>not ideal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impossible</td>
<td>possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>infinite</td>
<td>finite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>married</td>
<td>single / divorced /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>separated / widowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perfect</td>
<td>imperfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pregnant</td>
<td>not pregnant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unique</td>
<td>not unique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>universal</td>
<td>not universal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>true</td>
<td>false</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**

You might hear expressions like these in spoken English:

“That’s very true.”
“It’s the very first time...”
“This shirt is more unique than that one.”

These sentences are not technically correct, because we shouldn’t use the words “very” or “more” with absolute adjectives – but native speakers don’t always follow the rules!


Source: [http://www.espressoenglish.net/](http://www.espressoenglish.net/)
Now test your knowledge of extreme adjectives:

1. The comedian was __________! I laughed so hard I was almost crying.
   astounding
   fascinating
   hilarious

2. The kitchen was __________ by the time she finished cleaning it.
   furious
   hideous
   spotless

3. These __________ ruins were built by the Mayans thousands of years ago.
   ancient
   filthy
   packed

4. In my evaluation, the teacher said I was a __________ student and a joy to have in class
   Horrible
   gorgeous
   wonderful

5. My brother was __________ when I broke his brand-new cell phone.
   awful
   furious
   starving

6. The first time I had to speak at a big conference, I was __________ - my hands were actually shaking!
   exhausted
   terrified
   terrible

7. This hearing aid is so __________ you can barely see it.
   astounding
   filthy
   tiny

8. That dress is __________ - I can't believe it's considered "fashionable"!
   hideous
   freezing
   spotless

9. My kids fell asleep on the car ride home from the zoo - they were __________ from running around all day.
   exhausted
   furious
   terrifying

10. I'm not really into politics, but I find science ____________.

Source: http://www.espressoenglish.net/
Adverbs with Extreme Adjectives: decide if the following sentences are CORRECT OR INCORRECT

1. That painting is very gorgeous - the artist has real talent.
2. These books are fairly ancient - they were written two hundred years ago.
3. The classroom was almost empty during the week before Christmas; everyone had gone on vacation.
4. He became a multi-millionaire by the time he was 25 years old. His success is absolutely astounding.
5. It's a bit hot in here; could you open the window?
6. This project is rather gigantic - it's far too much work for just one person.
7. He lost his job and his car was stolen in the same week? Wow, that's really awful.
8. It's extremely essential that you bring all the necessary documents to your visa interview.
9. Your essay was nearly perfect - there was only one small punctuation error.
10. My new apartment is slightly tiny; there isn't enough room for all my furniture.