The Noun Phrase: Adding Intensifiers

So far we have determined that sentences have a subject and a predicate and we can represent this situation as follows:

S ➔ NP VP

A *Sentence* consists of a *Subject (Noun Phrase)* and a *Predicate (Verb Phrase)*

The first noun phrase in a simple sentence is the sentence's "subject."

We have also begun to see that the subject noun phrase (and other noun phrases for that matter) can be broken down as follows:

NP➔ (Det) (Adj)* N

A *Noun Phrase* consist of an *optional determiner*, *optional adjective phrases* and *one noun*.

…or at least this is what I said at the time. The situation just described is not entirely accurate though. How is this so? Lets take a look at a few sentences:

The incredibly happy student had his homework complete.
The somewhat sad student did not.
The extremely cold, brutally crisp morning was at least sunny.
A really old, weird cat lives in our house.

In all of these sentences we have a word that appears in front of the adjective: the adjective *happy* has the word *incredibly* in front of it; the sadness of the student is modified by the word *somewhat*; cold has *extremely* and the cat not just old…she's *really old*. She's not really weird but could be in other sentences; in this sentence though, she's just normal weird.

All of these words—happy, indridibly, somewhat, extremely and really—seem to be able to appear in front of an adjective. They can't appear behind the adjective. And when they appear in front of the adjective they colour or modify the meaning of the adjective. These words are not "obligatory" in terms of their appearance: they don't have to show up in front of the adjective that they modify. Thus it is possible to say, for instance:

The happy student had his homework complete.
The sad student did not.
The cold, brutally crisp morning was at least sunny.
An old, weird cat lives in our house.

And we seem to be able to move these little word around to accommodate different adjectives. Each time though, the word in question seems to affect the adjective following it. Thus for instance: we could re-write the third sentence:

The brutally crisp morning was at least sunny.
The crisp brutally cold morning was at least sunny.

The word *brutally* in the first sentence modifies the adjective *crisp* whereas in the second sentence it modifies *cold*: It modifies the word that follows it. Once again, if we look at a lot of well-formed English sentences (sentences that are considered to be grammatically correct and readable in English), we will see that the ideas just outlined seemed to hold pretty consistently. And having made the above observations we can make a rule about adjectives and these other words that *intensify* adjectives and the way that these two words function as a unit. We're going to call this unit an adjective phrase (not just an adjective) and the rule for an adjective phrase goes like this:

AdjP➔ (int) adj

Where *int* stands for *intensifier*. In many grammars these words that intensify or somehow alter the meaning of an adjective are usually referred to as adverbs. We're going to save the "adverb" word for something else though, and instead we are going to call these words (that we'll later find our are a sort of subcategory of adverbs) intensifiers.

And we'll alter our noun phrase rule as follows:

NP➔ (Det) **(AdjP)***N

In other words and adjective phrase can have an optional intensifier (but it doesn't <u>need</u> to have an intensifier) and there must be an adjective. The adjective phrase does not have to be in the noun phrase though. How do we diagram this? In class we will fill in the sentences following sentences together, and then we will go home and try out a few sentences with adjective phrases in the subject noun phrase.

The student had his homework complete.

The very happy student had his homework complete.

The somewhat sad student did not.

The extremely cold, brutally crisp morning was at least sunny.

This long, really wavy grass really needs cutting .

Homework:

1. A really old bicycle was in the ditch.
2. A fresh apple can be refreshing.
3. An cold, really large, red apple is even better.
4. A heavily polished apple is the best.
5. The older, generally weird English teacher has a fixation with apples!!
6. This long, complicated, very confusing, adjective-intensive sentence includes several adjective phrases.
7. This nominally difficult, extremely interesting grammar homework is complete.