

Focus: Degree modification, Informal vs formal register, Position of adverbs, quite a/an + adjective + noun, quite a lot of, quite + verb, Expressing negative ideas, Expressing unusual or surprising positives, Rather vs Pretty, Weakening adjectives

These adverbs modify adjectives, adverbs, and sometimes verbs. They tell us "how much" or "to what degree." At an intermediate level, the difficulty lies in the **word order** and the **nuance** (feeling) of the word.

1. The Scale of Strength (General Guide)

While context changes the meaning, generally the scale from weak to strong is:

- **Fairly** (weakest) → **Quite / Pretty** (medium) → **Rather** (stronger/formal) → **Very** (strong).

2. Word Order Rules

This is the most common mistake. Pay attention to where the article (**a/an**) goes.

- **Quite:** Used before the article.
 - Structure: quite a/an + adjective + noun
 - *Example:* It was **quite a** nice day. (NOT: a quite nice day)
- **Pretty:** Used after the article.
 - Structure: a pretty + adjective + noun
 - *Example:* It was **a pretty** nice day.
- **Rather:** Can be used in both positions (before or after), but often implies a specific feeling.
 - Structure: rather a/an... OR a rather...
 - *Example:* It was **rather a** difficult exam / It was **a rather** difficult exam.

3. Nuance and Usage

A. Quite

- **Meaning:** A little more than "fairly" but less than "very."
- **With Verbs:** We can place *quite* before verbs like *enjoy, like, agree, understand*.
 - *Example:* I **quite like** tennis. (I like it a moderate amount).
- **Quite a lot of:** Means a large amount.
 - *Example:* There were **quite a lot of** people there.

B. Pretty

- **Register:** Informal / Spoken English.
- **Meaning:** Similar to *quite*, but can be stronger depending on stress.

C. Rather

- **Register:** More formal; British English.
- **Negative Ideas:** Often used for negative criticism.
 - *Example:* The food was **rather cold**.
- **Surprising Positives:** Used when the result is better than expected.
 - *Example:* I thought it would be boring, but it was actually **rather interesting!**

D. Fairly

- **Meaning:** Weak. It implies "average" or "good enough, but not great."
 - *Example:* The film was **fairly good**. (It was okay, but I wouldn't watch it again).

Practice Exercises

Instruction: Complete the sentences using the words in parentheses.

Pay attention to word order (especially "a/an") and the position of the adverb.

1. That is _____ (quite / huge / house) for just two people to live in.
2. The exam was _____ (difficult / pretty), so I don't think I passed.
3. _____ (you / like / quite) watching horror movies, or do you prefer comedies?
4. I'm afraid I have _____ (news / bad / rather) for you regarding the project.
5. She didn't get the job, even though she had _____ (experience / lot / quite a / of).
6. It was _____ (fairly / day / dull), nothing special happened.
7. We _____ (enjoyed / quite) the concert, although the seats were uncomfortable.
8. To be honest, it was _____ (surprise / rather / a) to see him at the party.
9. The restaurant is _____ (expensive / pretty), so we only go there on special occasions.
10. He is _____ (quite / swimmer / good / a), isn't he?
11. The weather is _____ (unpleasant / rather) today, shall we stay inside?
12. _____ (understand / quite / you / do) what I am trying to say?
13. It was _____ (shock / quite / a) when they announced they were moving to Peru.
14. The instructions were _____ (confusing / pretty), so we couldn't build the table.
15. Actually, the soup was _____ (tasty / rather); I expected it to be bland!

Answer Key

1. **quite a huge house**
2. **pretty difficult**
3. **Do you quite like**
4. **rather bad news** (or *some rather bad news*)
5. **quite a lot of experience**
6. **a fairly dull day** (Note: *Fairly* usually goes after 'a')
7. **quite enjoyed**
8. **rather a surprise** (or *a rather big surprise*, but given the cues: *rather a surprise*)
9. **pretty expensive**
10. **quite a good swimmer**
11. **rather unpleasant**
12. **Do you quite understand**
13. **quite a shock**
14. **pretty confusing**
15. **rather tasty**