

# Adverbs of Frequency

## What is an adverb of frequency?

An adverb of frequency tells us **how often something happens**. We can use them in most tenses, but we **mainly use them with the present simple**.

## What are the most common adverbs of frequency in English?

| Adverb      | Approximate Meaning | Example                             |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| always      | 100% of the time    | I <b>always</b> have breakfast.     |
| usually     | most of the time    | She <b>usually</b> gets up at 7 am. |
| often       | many times          | We <b>often</b> walk to work.       |
| sometimes   | on some occasions   | He is <b>sometimes</b> late.        |
| hardly ever | not often           | I <b>hardly ever</b> drink coffee.  |
| never       | 0% of the time      | They <b>never</b> go to bed early.  |

## How do we use adverbs of frequency in English?

Let's look at where we put adverbs of frequency in a sentence.

### Quick guide:

| Verb               | Position             | Example                                    |
|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 1) most verbs      | before the main verb | I <b>usually drink</b> tea in the morning. |
| 2) <b>be</b>       | after the verb       | They <b>are always</b> tired on Friday.    |
| 3) auxiliary verbs | before the main verb | We <b>have often played</b> chess.         |

! These rules apply most of the time, but there are exceptions.

## 1) Most verbs

With most verbs, put the adverb immediately **before the main verb**.

Pattern: subject + **adverb** + main verb

For example:

- It **hardly ever rains** here in summer.
- We don't **usually go** to bed late.
- Do you **sometimes watch** TV in the evening?
- She **often went** to the beach as a child.

## 2) Be

With **am, is, are, was** and **were**, put the adverb **after the verb**.

Pattern: subject + be + **adverb**

(Questions: be + subject + **adverb**)

For example:

- My dog **is always** hungry.
- **Are** they **usually** busy on Saturdays?
- I **wasn't often** tired after school.
- They **were hardly ever** at home.

## 3) Auxiliary verbs (including modal verbs)

With verbs like **will, can, have** and **has**, put the adverb after the auxiliary verb and immediately **before the main verb**.

Pattern: subject + auxiliary + **adverb** + main verb

(Questions: auxiliary + subject + **adverb** + main verb)

For example:

- We **will always help** you.
- **Can** you **sometimes hear** the ocean at night?
- He **has never been** to London.
- They've **often gone** to work by bus.

## Exceptions

The adverbs **usually**, **often** and **sometimes** can also be placed at the beginning or end of the sentence. This is especially common with **sometimes**. This adds emphasis to the adverb.

For example:

- **Often** we walk to work.
- I watch TV in the evenings **sometimes**.

## Common Mistakes

1. Putting the adverb between the subject and **be**:

- NOT: ~~He often is happy.~~ Correct: He is often happy.

2. Putting the adverb after the main verb for verbs that are not **be**:

- NOT: ~~She goes often to the beach.~~ Correct: She often goes to the beach.

## Other adverbs of frequency

Here are some more examples of adverbs of frequency. These words can also be placed at the beginning or end of the sentence, but some sound quite formal or unnatural in those positions. When in doubt, put them in the middle of the sentence.

- normally
- regularly
- frequently
- generally
- occasionally
- infrequently
- rarely\*
- seldom\*

\*If you put **rarely**, **seldom**, **hardly ever** or **never** at the beginning of a sentence, you need to use inversion (this is quite advanced grammar). For example: **Rarely** do I go to the beach.

## Adverbial phrases of frequency

To talk about how often something happens, we can also use adverbial phrases of frequency. We often just call them "frequency expressions".

**We put these phrases at the beginning or end of the sentence.** We do not put them in the middle.

For example:

- He cleans the house **every now and then**.
- **Most of the time** I eat at home.

Here are some common phrases:

- all day/night
- on a daily basis
- a lot of the time
- most of the time
- from time to time
- once in a while
- every now and then
- every so often
- now and again
- at times
- [number of times] a [period of time] (e.g. once a day, twice a week, three times a month, several times a year)
- every [period of time] (e.g. every morning, every day, every Monday, every week)
- every [ordinal number] [period of time] (e.g. every second day, every fourth Friday)
- every other day ( = every second day)
- on [day + s] (e.g. on Mondays, on weekdays)  
Note: on Mondays = every Monday