Adverbials and their position

An adverbial can be an adverb, an adverb phrase or an adverb clause. In short, any word or phrase that gives us additional information about the time, place or manner of the verb given in the sentence can be considered as an adverbial. Of course, this is a very broad definition.

Study the examples given below.

- We have been living in this street for well over two decades.

Here the phrase ‘in this street for well over two decades’ is an example of an adverbial. It modifies the verb have been living.

Another example is given below.

- Ruth was working in the garden when it suddenly started raining.

Here the adverbial ‘in the garden when it suddenly started raining’ consists of the adverb phrase ‘in the garden’ and the adverb clause ‘when it suddenly started raining’.

Position of adverbials

Adverbials tend to go at the end of the sentence. Place adverbials (word groups or clauses referring to a place) usually come before time adverbials.

In the above example, the place adverbial ‘in the garden’ goes before the adverb clause of time ‘when it started raining’.

Manner adverbials (word groups or clauses showing the manner in which an action is performed) usually go before place adverbials.

- The protesters were shouting angrily when police started firing tear gas shells.

Here the manner adverbial (angrily) goes before the time adverbial ‘when police started firing tear gas shells.’

These are not absolute rules and adverbials can go in other places as well. For example, adverb clauses can go at the beginning of a sentence. This position is preferred when we want to emphasize them.