Mistakes in the use of copular verbs

Copular verbs are special kind of verbs used to join an adjective or noun complement to a subject. Examples are: seem, appear, look, sound, smell, taste, feel, become and get.

The problem with these verbs is that sometimes they are also used with other meanings as ordinary non-copular verbs. When they are used as copular verbs, they refer to states and are followed by adjectives or noun complements. When they are used as ordinary verbs, they refer to actions and are followed by adverbs.

Note that copular verbs are immediately followed by an adjective or noun complement that describes the subject. Ordinary verbs, on the other hand, are followed by a direct object or a prepositional phrase.

Incorrect: Most people felt angrily about the new tax laws.
Correct: Most people felt angry about the new tax laws.
Incorrect: I was beginning to feel coldly.
Correct: I was beginning to feel cold.
Incorrect: Do you feel happily?
Correct: Do you feel happy?
When feel means 'experience the condition of one's body or mind', it is followed by an adjective, not an adverb.

When feel is used as an ordinary verb it means 'touch'. In this case, it is followed by a direct object. The ordinary verb feel cannot be modified by an adjective.

He felt her cheeks gently. (= He touched her cheeks gently.) (NOT He felt her cheeks gentle.)

Incorrect: He looks smartly.
Correct: He looks smart.
Incorrect: She looked tiredly.
Correct: She looked tired.
In the example given above, look is a copular verb and hence it should be followed by an adjective.

Incorrect: He looked at me angry.
Correct: He looked at me angrily.
In the example given above, look is an ordinary verb and hence it should be modified by an adverb.