Comparatives and Superlatives of Adjectives

Comparatives and superlatives are formed using four simple rules.

One-Syllable Adjectives

We add –er and –est to one-syllable adjectives.

- clean → cleaner → the cleanest
- cold → colder → the coldest
- new → newer → the newest
- small → smaller → the smallest

If a one-syllable adjective ends in –e, we only add –r and –st to form the comparative and superlative, respectively.

- close → closer → the closest
- fine → finer → the finest
- large → larger → the largest
- late → later → the latest
- nice → nicer → the nicest
- wide → wider → the widest

If a one-syllable adjective ends in a single vowel plus a single consonant, we double the final consonant before adding –er and –est.

- big → bigger → the biggest
- fat → fatter → the fattest
- hot → hotter → the hottest
- sad → sadder → the saddest
- wet → wetter → the wettest

One-syllable adjectives that end in a consonant plus y change the y to i and add –er.

- dry → drier → the driest
- shy → shier → the shiest

British English prefers shyer, shyest. This form is also found in American English.
Pronunciation Tip
The comparative and superlative forms of adjectives that end in \(-ng\) are pronounced with a double \(g\) sound.

- longer [lɒŋər] longest [lɒŋəst]
- long \(\rightarrow\) longer \(\rightarrow\) the longest
- strong \(\rightarrow\) stronger \(\rightarrow\) the strongest
- young \(\rightarrow\) younger \(\rightarrow\) the youngest

Avoid Double Comparisons
Be sure not to make a double comparison. We say bigger NOT “more bigger,” for example.

Two-Syllable Adjectives
For two-syllable adjectives ending in a consonant + \(y\), we change the \(y\) to \(i\) and add \(-er\) and \(-est\).

- dirty \(\rightarrow\) dirtier \(\rightarrow\) the dirtiest
- easy \(\rightarrow\) easier \(\rightarrow\) the easiest
- funny \(\rightarrow\) funnier \(\rightarrow\) the funniest
- happy \(\rightarrow\) happier \(\rightarrow\) the happiest

For two-syllable adjectives that do not end in a consonant plus \(y\), we use \(more\) plus the adjective to form the comparative and \(the most\) to form the superlative.

- careful \(\rightarrow\) more careful \(\rightarrow\) the most careful
- common \(\rightarrow\) more common \(\rightarrow\) the most common
- complex \(\rightarrow\) more complex \(\rightarrow\) the most complex
- modern \(\rightarrow\) more modern \(\rightarrow\) the most modern

Adjectives of Three Syllables or More
For words of three-syllables or more, we use \(more\) plus the adjective to form the comparative and \(the most\) to form the superlative.

- comfortable \(\rightarrow\) more comfortable \(\rightarrow\) the most comfortable
- complicated \(\rightarrow\) more complicated \(\rightarrow\) the most complicated
- interesting \(\rightarrow\) more interesting \(\rightarrow\) the most interesting
- ridiculous \(\rightarrow\) more ridiculous \(\rightarrow\) the most ridiculous
Irregular Comparatives
A few adjectives have irregular comparative and superlative forms.

- bad → worse → the worst
- good → better → the best
- little → less → the least
- much/many → more → the most
- far → farther → the farthest (distance)
- far → further → the furthest (additional, more)

Adjectives that use more and the most can also use less and the least.

- Bill’s car is more expensive than Fred’s.
- Fred’s car is less expensive than Bill’s.

- Bill bought the most expensive car on the lot.
- Fred bought the least expensive car on the lot.

Using Comparatives
We use the word than after the comparative if we mention the person or thing we are comparing.

- John is older than Bill.
- The Nile is longer than the Mississippi.
- Brasilia is more modern than Rio de Janeiro.

If we do not mention the other person or thing we are comparing, we do not use than.

- This program is boring. Let’s watch something more interesting.
- Mary is a good student, but Susan is better.
- My neighbor is going to buy a bigger house.
- This restaurant is too expensive. Why don’t we go somewhere cheaper?

We use the object form of pronouns after than in comparative statements if we do not add a verb.

- John is stronger than him.
  BUT
- John is stronger than he is.
We can modify a comparative with words like *much, a lot, a little, a bit, a good deal,* etc.

- Rome is much older than New York.
- This TV is a lot more expensive than that one.
- My laptop is a little less expensive than Jim’s.
- Jim’s laptop is a little more expensive than mine.
- Our new textbook is a bit cheaper than our old one.
- I think dramas are much more interesting than soap operas.
- Mr. Williams is a good deal older than his wife.

**Adjectives Using Both Comparative Forms**

Several adjectives can form their comparative and superlative forms using either *–er and –est,* or *more and the most.*

The student can simply apply the basic rules. It is not necessary to try to use both forms.

**Using the Superlative**

Superlatives are used when we are speaking of three or more to indicate that something or someone is number one in that group.

- Mexico City is the largest city in the world.
- A sloth is the slowest animal in the world.
- Where is the nearest ATM?
- The final exam is the most important of all.
- Mark was the most experienced of the applicants.