

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 drier
- 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 [lɒŋgər] longest [lɒŋgəst]
- long → longer → the longest
- strong → stronger → the strongest
- young → younger → 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 → dirtier → the dirtiest
- easy → easier → the easiest
- funny → funnier → the funniest
- happy → happier → 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 → more careful → the most careful
- common → more common → the most common
- complex → more complex → the most complex
- modern → more modern → 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 → more comfortable → the most comfortable
- complicated → more complicated → the most complicated
- interesting → more interesting → the most interesting
- ridiculous → more ridiculous → 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.