

Comparative/superlative

Comparative is the name for the grammar used when comparing two things. The two basic ways to compare are using **as .. as** or **than**. Examples of each are shown below:

- She's twice **as** old **as** her sister.
- He's not **as** stupid **as** he looks!
- I'm almost **as** good in maths **as** in science.
- This book is not **as** exciting **as** the last one.
- The cafeteria is not **as** crowded **as** usual.
- Russian is not quite **as** difficult **as** Chinese.
- This computer is better **than** that one.
- She's stronger at chess **than** I am.
- It's much colder today **than** it was yesterday.
- Our car is bigger **than** your car.
- This grammar topic is easier **than** most others.
- I find science more difficult **than** mathematics.
- Today's ESL lesson was more interesting **than** usual.

Note: In each of the example sentences above, the comparative form of the **adjective** is shown. See the foot of this page for information about the comparison of **adverbs**.

When comparing with **as .. as**, the adjective does not change. When comparing with **than**, however, some changes are necessary, depending on the number of syllables the adjective has:

1-syllable adjectives: add **-er** to the adjective

- My sister is much **taller** than me.†
- It's **colder** today than it was yesterday.

Note: If the word ends: *consonant-vowel-consonant*, then the last consonant is usually doubled in the comparative. Examples: *big-bigger*; *fat-fatter*; *hot-hotter*.

2-syllable adjectives ending in **-y**: change the **-y** to **-ier**

- She's looking **happier** today.
- This grammar topic is **easier** than the last one.
- Why is everyone else **luckier** than me? †

Beware: Do not confuse adjectives and adverbs. 2-syllable adverbs ending in **-y** must be compared with the word *more*. Example: *I drive more quickly (quicklier) than my brother*.

Other 2-syllable adjectives: use **more** with the unchanged adjective

- The shops are always **more crowded** just before Christmas.
- Is there anything **more boring** than reading about grammar?
- My sister is **more careful** with her writing than I am with mine.

Note: The comparative of some shorter 2-syllable adjectives can be formed with **-er**. Examples: *simple-simpler*; *clever-cleverer*; *narrow-narrower*. To be sure which comparative method to use, you will need to consult a good dictionary.

Adjectives with 3 or more syllables: use **more** with the unchanged adjective

- Russian grammar is **more difficult** than English grammar.
- My sister is much **more intelligent** than me.†

- I find maths lessons **more enjoyable** than science lessons.
 - The older you get, the **more irritating** you become.
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In the **superlative** you talk about *one* thing only and how it is the best, worst, etc. You do not compare *two* things. The following guidelines apply to the superlative:

1-syllable adjectives: add **-est** to the adjective (plus *the*)

- My sister is **the tallest** in our family.
- Yesterday was **the coldest** day of the year so far.

Note: If the word ends: *consonant-vowel-consonant*, then the last consonant is usually doubled in the superlative. Examples: *big-biggest, fat-fattest, hot-hottest*.

2-syllable adjectives ending in **-y**: change the **-y** to **-iest** (plus *the*)

- The richest people are not always **the happiest**.
- Which do you think is **the easiest** language to learn?
- She's **the luckiest** person I know.

Beware: Do not confuse adjectives and adverbs. 2-syllable adverbs ending in **-y** form their superlative with the words *the most*. Example: *Of all the people I know my father drives the most quickly (quickliest)*.

Other 2-syllable adjectives: use **the most** with the unchanged adjective

- **The most boring** thing about ESL class is doing grammar exercises.
- My sister is **the most careful** person I know.

Note: The superlative of some shorter 2-syllable adjectives can be formed with **-er**. Examples: *simple-simplest, clever-cleverest, narrow-narrowest*. To be sure which superlative method to use, you will need to consult a good dictionary.

Adjectives with 3 or more syllables: use **the most** with the unchanged adjective

- Some people think that Russian is **the most difficult** language.
- Albert Einstein was **the most intelligent** person in history.
- My **most enjoyable** class is English.
- You are **the most irritating** person I have ever met!

Following are two common irregular comparative/superlative forms:

- good-better-the best
 - bad-worse-the worst
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The following guidelines apply to the **comparative/superlative of most adverbs**:

1-syllable adverbs: add **-er/-est**

- I can run **faster** than you. / I can run **the fastest** in my class.
- She works **harder** than me.† / She works **the hardest** of all students.

Other adverbs: use **more / the most***

- She ran **more quickly** than me.† / Of all the students she ran **the most quickly**.

* In informal English it is common to hear the adjectival comparative/superlative form of two-syllable adverbs. For example: *She ran quicker than me.† | She ran the quickest*.

† Many educated English speakers prefer to use the nominative plus a verb rather than the accusative in such comparative sentences, especially in formal situations. They say, for example, *My sister is taller than I am.* or *She ran more quickly than I did.*

The alternative, omitting the verb as in the following examples, is considered to be even more formal and is avoided by most British English speakers: *My sister is taller than I.* or *She ran more quickly than I.*