

23.1 Forms of Comparatives and Superlatives

Of the three degrees of comparison of adjectives denoting a quality (positive, comparative, and superlative) we have only been using, aside from a few exceptions noted in the vocabulary, the positive degree. This is the straightforward application of an adjective: *κοῦφος*, *η*, *ον* = light, *σοφός*, *ή*, *όν* = wise.

The *comparative* degree pairs two nouns to which such an adjective applies, X and Y. For a comparison of equality or inferiority the adjective does not change its ending: X is as ... as Y, or less ... than Y. For a *comparison of superiority*, however (which is what the "comparative degree" refers to) both in English and in Greek, some adjectives add a suffix. In English only monosyllabic adjectives add the suffix -er: light-**er**, wis-**er**, while adjectives of more than one syllable must resort to adverbs such as "more": more difficult. In both languages the term of comparison (the Y element) is usually expressed. In English we articulate it as "... than Y."

In Greek the comparative suffix, **-ότερος, α, ον** creates a "Type 1" adjective. It should be added to the stem of the adjective minus the vowel stem: *κουφ-ότερος*, *α*, *ον* = lighter

The ending **-ώτερος, α, ον** should be used when the syllable preceding the suffix is short, as in *σοφ-* : *σοφ-ώτερος*, *α*, *ον* = wiser.

A *superlative* assigns the quality expressed by the adjective in a very high degree (absolute superlative: very light or wise) or in the highest degree with reference to a class or group (relative superlative: the lightest or wisest of all). In English the suffix -est is used only for the second type. In Greek the superlative suffix is used for both. Again,

The superlative suffix, **-ότατος, η, ον** creates a "Type 1" adjective. It should be added to the stem of the adjective minus the vowel stem: *κουφ-ότατος*, *η*, *ον* = lightest, very light

The ending **-ώτατος, η, ον** should be used when the syllable preceding the suffix is short, as in σοφ- : σοφ-ώτατος, η, ον = wisest, very wise

Adjectives of the 3rd declension offer some peculiarities:

<i>positive degree</i>	<i>comparative</i>	<i>superlative</i>
εὐδαίμων, εὐδαιμον	εὐδαιμον- έστερος, α, ον	εὐδαιμον- έστατος, α, ον
ἀληθής, ἀληθές	ἀληθ- έστερος, η, ον	ἀληθ- έστατος, η, ον

You will become familiar with irregular comparatives and superlatives as you further your reading and increase your vocabulary. Here are some examples:

Irregular comparatives and superlatives

<i>The following tend to have these</i>	<i>irregular comparative forms</i>	<i>irregular superlative forms</i>
Adjectives ending in -ύς. Example:		
ήδύς, ήδεϊα, ήδύ = sweet	ήδιών, ήδιον = sweeter	ήδιστος, η, ον = sweetest
Adjectives ending in -ρός. Example:		
αἰσχρός, ά, όν = ugly, shameful	αἰχίων, αἰσχιον ¹ = uglier, more shameful	αἰσχιστος, η, ον = ugliest, most shameful

Comparatives and superlatives based on a different stem:

Adjectives that tend to have an irregular comparative and superlative based on a different stem (compare with English better, worse, etc. All these comparatives decline as in Note 1. When there is more than one sequence of comparatives and superlatives for a given positive, there are shades of meaning that you will learn best in practice.		
ἀγαθός, ή, όν	βελτίων, βέλτιον ἀμείνων, ἄμεινον κρείσσων, κρεῖσσον	βέλτιστος, η, ον ἄριστος, η, ον κράτιστος, η, ον
καλός, ή, όν	καλλίων, κάλλιον	κάλλιστος, η, ον
μέγας, μεγάλη, μέγα	μείζων, μειζον	μέγιστος, η, ον
πολύς, πολλή, πολύ	πλείων /πλέων, πλείον / πλέον	πλεῖστος, η, ον

Notes

Declined as εὐδαίμων, εὐδαιμον (see 10.5), but it has some alternative contracted forms after V was dropped: Acc masc/fem sg ήδίονα > ήδίο-α > ήδίω, Nom masc/fem pl ήδiónες > ήδίο-ες > ήδίους, and a contracted Acc masc/fem pl by analogy with the Nominative, also ήδίους.