

# Superlative

## Definition of Superlative

Superlative is a literary device that is usually an adjective or adverb used to distinguish an object from three or more others of its type. Superlative is used in both literary as well as scientific writing to emphasize certain objects, persons, places, or events, which have unique or extraordinary attributes. The term superlative can only be applied when three or more objects are compared.

Superlatives are usually formed by adding the suffix *-est* to most adjectives and adverbs, or by adding “most” or “least” before them. Some common examples of superlative are given below.

My cousin is the **tallest** among the giants

Ellen DeGeneres gave the **funniest** commencement speech in the history of our university.

Which do you suppose is the **most difficult** language to learn?

## Superlative and Adjective/Adverb

It is important to note here that superlatives should not be confused with comparative adjectives and adverbs. In comparative adjectives or adverbs you compare two objects, while the superlative [comparison](#) is between three or more objects.

## Examples of Superlative in Literature

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Example #1: *King Lear, Act Two, Scene 3* (By William Shakespeare)

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“While I may scape,  
I will preserve myself: and am bethought  
To take the basest and **most poorest** shape,

That ever penury, in contempt of man,  
Brought near to beast.”

Just observe the words in bold. Here, the double superlative has been used by Shakespeare.

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### Example #2: *Song* (By John Donne)

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“**Sweetest** Love! I do not go  
For weariness of thee,  
Nor in hope the world can shew  
A fitter love for me...”

John Donne employed some of the most beautiful usage of superlatives in his famous poems, such as the one given here: “*Sweetest* Love.”

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### Example #3: *A Fever* (By John Donne)

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“Or if when thou, the world’s soul, goest  
It stay, ’t is but thy carcase then,  
The **fairest** woman but thy ghost,  
But corrupt worms the **worthiest** men.”

The words in bold are two superlative examples.

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### Example #4: *I Love You the Purplest* (By Barbara M. Josse)

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“Mama, who has the **most** worms?” he asked.  
Mama smiled. “Max, your can is full of the **liveliest** worms.  
And Julian, your can has the **juiciest**.”

Barbara M. Josse has used some beautiful examples of superlatives in her “I Love You the Purplest.”

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“It has the **longest** rides of any subway in the world, the **biggest** stations, the **fastest** trains, the **most** track, the **most** passengers, the **most** police officers. It also has the **filthiest** trains, the **most** bizarre graffiti, the **noisiest** wheels, the **craziest** passengers, the **wildest** crimes.”

Paul Theroux, in “Subterranean Gothic,” makes a very interesting use of superlative as can be seen in this paragraph.

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**Example #6: *The Anthologist* (By Nicholson Baker)**

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“It is turning out to be the **most beautiful, most quiet, largest, most generous**, sky-vaulted summer I’ve ever seen or known – inordinately blue, with greener leaves and taller trees than I can remember, and the sound of the lawnmowers all over this valley is a sound I could hum to forever.”

Another amusing example of superlatives can be found in *The Anthologist*, by Nicholson Baker, as shown in the above excerpt.

## **Function of Superlative**

A superlative is used to indicate an extreme or unsurpassed level of emotion, association, or hatred for an object or a person, or even an event. Particularly, in literature it is used to show the best or the worst of something, to add color or [romance](#) to a literary piece.