

Adjectives: Comparative and Superlative

Adjectives are words that describe, identify, or quantify nouns and pronouns. They help specify our writing by offering more details about nouns and pronouns.

Comparative Adjectives

Comparative adjectives are used to compare two things—they help describe differences between two nouns.

Comparative Adjective Sentence Formula

Comparative adjectives are generally used in the following sentence structure:

Noun (subject) + verb + comparative adjective + than + noun (object)

Example Sentence

My television + is + bigger + than + my computer.

My television is bigger than my computer.

In some cases, the sentence will end after the comparative adjective and not include the object of comparison. This structure is possible when the context has provided enough information to make the comparison clear.

Example Sentence

My brother is 6 feet tall, but my father is taller. (“than my brother” is implied)

Superlative Adjectives

Superlative adjectives are used to compare three or more things. They help describe things on either end of a spectrum (e.g., smallest and largest, tallest and shortest).

Superlative Adjective Sentence Formula

Superlative adjectives are generally used in the following sentence structure:

Noun (subject) + verb + the + superlative adjective + noun (object)

Example Sentence

My English professor + is + the + smartest + person.

My English professor is the smartest person.

Just like comparative adjectives, the object of comparison can sometimes be left out.

Example Sentence

We took an exam in class today, and I scored the highest. (“in the class” is implied)

Creating Comparative and Superlative Adjectives

Changing an adjective into its comparative or superlative form depends on the number of syllables in the base form of the adjective (e.g., small, tall, big).

One-Syllable Adjectives

The suffix *-er* will be added for comparative adjectives and *-est* for superlative adjectives. When the adjective has a single vowel between two consonants (consonant + single vowel + consonant), the second consonant will be doubled.

Example of a Comparative Adjective with a Single Vowel Between Two Consonants

Adjective: hot

h (consonant) + *o* (single vowel) + *t* (second consonant)

Comparative form: hotter

h (consonant) + *o* (single vowel) + *tt* (doubled second consonant) + *er* (comparative suffix)

In a sentence: The temperature is hotter today than yesterday.

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative
fast	faster	fastest
cheap	cheaper	cheapest
fresh	fresher	freshest
big	bigger	biggest
sad	sadder	saddest

Two-Syllable Adjectives

For comparative adjectives, the suffix *-er* will be added, or it will be preceded by *more*. For superlative adjectives, the suffix *-est* will be added, or it will be preceded by *most*. Occasionally, both forms are used, but one will be more common. When in doubt, use *more* or *most* instead of a suffix. For adjectives ending in *y*, the *y* will become an *i*, and the appropriate suffix will be added.

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative
gentle	gentler	gentlest
clumsy	clumsier	clumsiest
happy	happier	happiest
anxious	more anxious	most anxious
polite	more polite	most polite

Three Syllables or More

Comparative adjectives will be preceded by *more*, and superlative adjectives will be preceded by *most*.

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative
important	more important	most important
attractive	more attractive	most attractive
embarrassed	more embarrassed	most embarrassed

Irregular Adjectives and Exceptions

Although there are several rules for writing in English, these rules often have irregularities and exceptions. Sometimes, the deviants follow a pattern that makes them easy to spot, but this is not the case for comparative and superlative adjectives. Abnormal adjectives simply have to be committed to memory.

Irregular adjectives

Adjectives are irregular when their comparative and superlative forms do not adhere to the rules discussed in this handout. The chart below displays some examples of irregular adjectives.

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative
good	better	best
bad	worse	worst
little	less	least
much	more	most
far	farther/further	farthest/furthest

Exceptions

Adjectives are exceptions to the rules discussed in this handout when they simply do not have a comparative or superlative form. Some examples include blind, unique, vertical, wrong, left, intelligent, complete, perfect, etc.

Activity 1

Directions: Complete the sentences with the correct comparative or superlative adjective based on the adjective provided in parentheses.

1. The Burj Khalifa building in Dubai is the _____(tall) building in the world.
2. Labradors are _____(big) than Chihuahuas.
3. We built rockets in physics class today. Mine flew the _____(high).
4. My necklace is _____(expensive) than my bracelet.
5. I got a C on my essay, which is _____(bad) than the 100% I got last time.
6. Homework is _____(important) than watching television.
7. Watching television makes me _____(happy) than doing homework.
8. To save money, I am searching for the _____(cheap) textbooks.
9. My grandmother's chocolate chip cookies are the _____(good).
10. Driving on a dirt road is _____(bumpy) than driving on asphalt.

Answer Key for Activity 1

1. tallest
2. bigger
3. highest
4. more expensive
5. worse
6. more important
7. happier
8. cheapest
9. best
10. bumpier

Activity 2

Directions: Each of the following sentences has an error in the use of comparative or superlative adjectives. Identify the error and correct it.

1. My bed is more big than my desk.
2. Usain Bolt can run fast than me.
3. You are most generous than my brother.
4. Of all our luggage, mine is the heavier.
5. Michelangelo's *David* is the more realistic statue I have ever seen.
6. The weather during the summer is the most hot than during the winter.
7. Frank Ocean is the goodest musician of the decade.
8. The Earth is closest to the moon than the sun.
9. You should always turn in your work because some points are best than no points.
10. The Writing Center is the greater resource for writing help on campus!

Answer Key for Activity 2

1. My bed is *bigger* than my desk.
2. Usain Bolt can run *faster* than me.
3. You are *more* generous than my brother.
4. Of all our luggage, mine is *the heaviest*.
5. Michelangelo's *David* is the *most realistic* statue I have ever seen.
6. The weather during the summer is *hotter* than during the winter.
7. Frank Ocean is the *best/greatest* musician of the decade.
8. The Earth is *closer* to the moon than the sun.
9. You should always turn in your work because some points are *better* than no points.
10. The Writing Center is the *greatest* resource for writing help on campus!

References

Lunsford, Andrea. *The Everyday Writer*. 2nd Edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2002. Print.

“The comparative and the superlative.” *Education First*, <https://www.ef.edu/english-resources/english-grammar/comparative-and-superlative/>. Accessed 5 November 2020.