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The comparative and the superlative

Comparative adjectives

Comparative adjectives are used to compare differences between the two objects they modify (*larger, smaller, faster, higher*). They are used in sentences where two nouns are compared, in this pattern:

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

The second item of comparison can be omitted if it is clear from the context (final example below).

Examples

- My house is **larger** than hers.
- This box is **smaller** than the one I lost.

Superlative adjectives

Superlative adjectives are used to describe an object which is at the upper or lower limit of a quality (*the tallest, the smallest, the fastest, the highest*). They are used in sentences where a subject is compared to a group of objects.

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

The group that is being compared with can be omitted if it is clear from the context (final example below).

Examples

- My house is the **largest** one in our neighborhood.
- This is the **smallest** box I've ever seen.

Forming regular comparatives and superlatives

Forming comparatives and superlatives is easy. The form depends on the number of syllables in the original adjective.

One syllable adjectives

Add *-er* for the comparative and *-est* for the superlative. If the adjective has a consonant + single vowel + consonant spelling, the final consonant must be doubled before adding the ending.

Adjective Comparative Superlative

tall	taller	tallest
fat	fatter	fattest
big	bigger	biggest
sad	sadder	saddest

Two syllables

Adjectives with two syllables can form the comparative either by adding *-er* or by preceding the adjective with *more*. These adjectives form the superlative either by adding *-est* or by preceding the adjective with *most*. In many cases, both forms are used, although one usage will be more common than the other. If you are not sure whether a two-syllable adjective can take a comparative or superlative ending, play it safe and use *more* and *most* instead. For adjectives ending in *y*, change the *y* to an *i* before adding the ending.

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative
happy	happier	happiest
simple	simpler	simplest
busy	busier	busiest
tilted	more tilted	most tilted
tangled	more tangled	most tangled

Three or more syllables

Adjectives with three or more syllables form the comparative by putting *more* in front of the adjective, and the superlative by putting *most* in front.

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative
important	more important	most important
expensive	more expensive	most expensive

Irregular comparatives and superlatives

These very common adjectives have completely irregular comparative and superlative forms.

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

Examples

- Today is the **worst** day I've had in a long time.
- Your painting is **better** than mine.

Activity one: Fill in the gaps with the comparative or the superlative form of the adjectives given.

1. This armchair is than the old one. (comfortable)
2. Trains are than aeroplanes. (slow)
3. I bought the souvenir I could afford. (expensive)
4. In this classroom there are girls than boys. (many)
5. Ann is the child in the family. (young)
6. That TV set is the of all. (cheap)
7. You are here than there. (safe)
8. Fifi is than Kate. (pretty)
9. This is the film I have ever seen. (exciting)
10. Tim is than Peter. (talented)

Answers :

1. This armchair is **more comfortable** than the old one.
2. Trains are **slower** than aeroplanes.
3. I bought the **most expensive** souvenir I could afford.
4. In this classroom there are **more** girls than boys.
5. Ann is the **youngest** child in the family.
6. That TV set is the **cheapest** of all.
7. You are **safer** here than there.
8. Fifi is **prettier** than Kate.
9. This is the **most exciting** film I have ever seen.
10. Tim is more **talented** than Peter.