

# Comparative and Superlative

In English there are two common forms for **comparative** and **superlative**. With small adjectives and adverbs **-er** respectively **-est** is added. With big adjectives and adverbs **more** respectively **most** is placed before them.

**Comparative** is used to compare an aspect of one noun with that of one other. **Superlative** is used to compare an aspect of one noun with that of the rest. (See the picture Comparative and Superlative. Freely available from <https://www.held.com.br/resources/>).

Examples comparative:

example sentence	root form		comparative
Jack is bigger than Ron.	big	⇒	bigger
A Mercedes is more expensive than a Volks Wagen.	expensive	⇒	more expensive

Examples superlative:

example sentence	root form		superlative
Albert is the tallest in our class.	tall	⇒	tallest
Titanium is the hardest metal.	hard	⇒	hardest
Football is the most popular sport.	popular	⇒	most popular

In this context words of one syllable are small, words of more than two syllables are big.

For words of two syllables there is a complicated rule to find out if it takes **-er** respectively **-est** or **more** respectively **most**. The rule is, comparative and superlative of two syllable words ending in **-y**, **-le**, **-er**, **-ow**, normally take **-er** respectively **-est**. Other two syllable take **more** respectively **most**.

It is peculiar that in this grammar rule the word 'normally' is used. One could say that because of the word 'normally' it isn't a rule. That is why it is better to use the following practical rule.

If the word sounds small, use **-er** respectively **-est**, and if it sounds big, use **more** respectively **most**.

---

This handout can be downloaded for free from: <https://www.held.com.br/resources/>

Examples:

root form	comparative	superlative
happy	happier	happiest
simple	simpler	simplest
young	younger	youngest
ugly	uglier	uglyest
beautiful	more beautiful	most beautiful
complex	more complex	most complex
difficult	more difficult	most difficult
tidy	tidier	tidiest
dirty	dirtier	dirtiest
helpful	more helpful	most helpful
handsome	more handsome	most handsome
pretty	prettier	prettiest

Enfos

## Using *than* with comparative

The word *than* is often used with comparative but it is not always necessary or correct to use it. Whether you have to use it, depends much more on the grammar and meaning of the word *than*. The connector *than* can be used when there is a clear comparing structure. Sometimes other words can be used to indicate the comparison. Sometimes the comparison is implicit.

Examples:

Roberta is taller than Ann.

John is tall but his sister is taller.

We would really like to buy the Mercedes but we can't afford it. We will buy the Renault. It is cheaper.

## Using *the* and *of* with superlative

With superlative the definite article *the* is used because there is only one that can be the most extreme in the group. When a noun indicates the only possible item, the definite article is used. The connector *of* can be used to specify the other items of the group of the comparison. Other words or phrases can also be used to indicate the relation.

Examples:

Tokyo is the biggest city.

The biggest city of Europe is Moscow.

You told me the names of the reggae singers you like best but you should listen to Linton Kwesi Johnson, for me he is the best.

The Port of Shanghai is the biggest port in the world based on cargo throughput.

The Port of Rotterdam is currently (2016) the biggest port in Europe and the sixth biggest in the world by annual cargo throughput.

# Irregular forms

Some adjectives and adverbs have irregular comparative and superlative. Not only do these irregular adjectives and adverbs have a comparative and superlative forms which escape from the above described pattern, in some cases two different words have the same comparative and the same superlative. There are also words which, for different meanings have different superlative and comparative. See the following table.

root form	comparative	superlative
good	better	best
well	better	best
bad	worse	worst
ill	worse	worst
many	more	most
much	more	most
little	less	least
(few is regular)		
late (time)	later	latest
late (order)	later	last
far (distance)	farther	farthest
far (extent)	further	furthest

This handout can be downloaded for free from: <https://www.held.com.br/resources/>