

The Comparative and the Superlative

One of the most common things we do in our everyday language is to compare things. It might be comparing restaurants, candidates for a job position, or films to see at the cinema. So how do we make comparatives and superlatives in English? Read on to find out all the information you need about comparing.

What are comparatives and superlatives?

We use comparatives and superlatives to say how people or things are different. We use a comparative adjective to express how two people or things are different, and we use a superlative adjective to show how one person or thing is different to all the others of its kind. For example,

*Mick is **taller** than Jack.*

*Mick is **the tallest** person in the family.*

Now let's focus on the details of how to create each of these adjectives.

Comparatives

Comparative adjectives enable us to express the difference between two people or things. In order to say that someone or something has a superior quality, size, or characteristic, you need to use 'more'. Instead, when you want to say that someone or something has an inferior quality, size, or characteristic, you must use 'less'.

More

The way we make a comparative with 'more' depends on the length of the word. There are three different cases:

1) *More* for long adjectives.

If an adjective has two or more syllables, we add the word 'more' in front to create the comparative form. For example:

*This hotel is **more expensive** than the last hotel we stayed at.*

*Reading is **more interesting** than watching television.*

*The sea here is **more beautiful** than the sea in my country.*

2) *-er* for short adjectives

If an adjective has one syllable, or two syllables with -y as the second syllable, we add -er to create the comparative. For example:

*Your house is **bigger** than mine.*

*Taking the bus is **cheaper** than taking the car.*

*This box is **heavier** than that one.*

As you can see in the first example, if an adjective ends in a vowel and consonant (e.g. *big*) you need to double the final consonant. For example, *bigger*, *fatter*, *thinner*.

3) Irregular comparatives

As is often the case in English, there are some adjectives that are irregular and don't follow these rules. Here are the irregular comparatives:

good – better

bad – worse

far – further (U.K. English) *farther* (US English)

fun – fun

For example,

Your cooking is better than my cooking.

Arriving late is worse than arriving early.

Their house is further from here than our house.

Going out is more fun than staying at home.

Using 'than'

When you refer to the two people/things you are comparing, you need to use 'than'. For example,

Living in the city is better than living in the country.

But if it's clear what you're referring to, it's also possible to make a comparison without repeating one of the things, and in this case you don't need to use 'than'. For example,

Living in the city is more expensive.

Less

We use 'less' to say that someone or something has an inferior quality, size or characteristic. It's easy to use because you simply put 'less' in front of any adjective. For example:

Walking is less tiring than running.

Australia is less populated than China.

Hamburgers are less healthy than vegetables.

Superlatives

We use superlatives to compare one person or thing to several others. For example,

Paris is the most beautiful city I've ever seen.

This means that I've seen several cities and I consider Paris as the number one in terms of being beautiful.

In a similar way to comparatives, there are two ways to use superlatives. When you want to say that one person or thing is superior to all others in that group, you need to use ‘the most’. When you want to say that one person or thing is inferior to all others in that group, you need to use ‘the least’.

The most

Similarly to comparatives, we use ‘the most’ in different ways according to the length of the adjectives:

1) *The most* for long adjectives.

If an adjective has two or more syllables, we add ‘the most’ in front to create the superlative form. For example:

She’s the most determined candidate we’ve seen today.

It’s the most difficult part of my job.

This is the most successful year the company’s ever had.

2) *-est* for short adjectives

If an adjective has one syllable, or two syllables with -y as the second syllable, we add -est to create the superlative. For example:

It’s the shortest route to the stadium.

What’s the longest flight you’ve ever taken?

He’s the nicest guy I’ve met here.

As with comparatives, if an adjective ends in a vowel and consonant (e.g. *sad*) you need to double the final consonant. For example, *saddest, fittest, hottest*.

3) Irregular superlatives

The same adjectives that are irregular for comparatives are also irregular for the superlative form:

good – best

bad – worst

far – furthest (U.K. English) *farthest* (US English)

fun – fun

Here are some examples:

Is this the best place to eat in town?

Yesterday’s performance was my worst ever.

Alaska is the furthest state from Florida.

That was the most fun I’ve had in a long time!

The least

We use 'the least' to say that someone or something has an inferior quality, size or characteristic compared to all others of its type. Simply put 'the least' in front of any adjective. For example:

Cleaning the floor is my least favorite type of housework.

The least difficult tense in English is the [present simple](#).

He's the least active person I know. He's very lazy.

As ... as

There is another way to compare people and things in English which is using *as* + adjective + *as*. We use this form to say that things are or aren't the same. For example:

I'm as tall as my brother. (We are the same height.)

This book isn't as good as that one. (The quality of the books is not the same.)

Are you as hungry as I am? (Are we hungry in the same way?)

Using comparatives, superlatives and *as* + *as*.

Here are some examples of each of these forms with the same adjective:

'Nice'

My new neighbors are nicer than the last ones.

The previous neighbors were less nice.

Mr Berry is the nicest neighbor I have.

Mr Lewis isn't as nice as Mr Berry.

'Challenging'

Her new job is more challenging than her last job.

Her last job was less challenging.

It's the most challenging job she's ever had.

Her last job wasn't as challenging as this one.

Learning how to use comparatives and superlatives will make a big difference to your level of conversation. In the courses at Wall Street English you learn these forms of [English grammar](#) through listening and speaking and in both personal and business contexts. Now that you've read about how they work, try this fun quiz to practice