



FREE RESOURCE · GRAMMAR

Comparatives and superlatives

A comparative compares two things: taller, more expensive. A superlative shows the top or bottom of three or more: the tallest, the most expensive. Add -er or -est to short adjectives, use more or most with long adjectives, and learn the irregular forms such as better and best.

What to know

How to form them

The rule depends on the length of the adjective. One-syllable adjectives usually take -er and -est: fast, faster, fastest. If the word ends in one vowel plus one consonant, double the consonant: big, bigger, biggest. If it ends in -y, change y to i: busy, busier, busiest.

- *cheap, cheaper, the cheapest · big, bigger, the biggest*
- *crowded, more crowded, the most crowded · good, better, the best*

Making a comparison

With a comparative, use than to show the second item: Trains are faster than buses. With a superlative, use the, and often add a group or place with in or of: The museum is the oldest building in the town. This is the most useful app of all.

The more ..., the ... pattern

This pattern shows that two changes happen together: The more people use public transport, the less traffic there is. The higher the price, the fewer customers buy. Use the before both comparatives, and put a comma between the clauses.

Less, least and fewer

Comparatives can also point downwards. Less + adjective is the opposite of more + adjective: Public transport is less expensive than taxis. The least + adjective is the opposite of the most: It was the least popular option.

Adverbs can compare too

Adverbs follow the same rules, but check the form. Short adverbs take -er and -est: run faster, work harder, arrive earlier. Most adverbs ending in -ly use more and most: more quickly, most carefully. Well and badly are irregular: better and worse.

Exercises

1. Trains are _____ than buses in this region.
 - a. more fast
 - b. faster
 - c. fastest
2. This is _____ library in the city.
 - a. the largest

- b. the most large
- c. larger
3. Online courses are _____ than classroom courses for many adults.
- a. most flexible
- b. more flexible
- c. flexibler
4. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) Food in the city (2) is more cheaper (3) than food (4) in the village.
5. Begin with Cycling. Put the words in order (one or more words are not needed): than / more / is / healthier / driving. / Cycling
6. Correct this: *She is more taller than her brother.*
7. Of all the cities I have visited, Lisbon is _____ beautiful one.
- a. the most
- b. very
- c. more
8. The _____ the temperature rises, the faster the ice melts.
- a. more high
- b. higher
- c. highest
9. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) Tokyo is (2) one of the (3) most biggest (4) cities in the world.
10. My flat is not as big _____ my sister's.
- a. as
- b. than
- c. that

Practise online, free: hear every example and check your answers at www.ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/comparatives-and-superlatives/practice/

IELTS tip. In Writing Task 1, use the superlative for the highest and lowest figures and a comparative for the rest, with words like slightly and considerably to show size of difference. In Speaking Part 1, a comparative lets you give a reason: I prefer living in a small town because it is quieter than a city.

FOR TEACHERS · GRAMMAR

Comparatives and superlatives

AIM	Learners form comparatives and superlatives correctly and use them to describe differences in Task 1 data.
TIME	30 minutes
LEVEL	B1 to B2 (IELTS 5 to 6.5)
MATERIALS	This worksheet, one copy per learner; the free online practice for the audio

Warm-up

Ask learners to compare two cities they know with three sentences each. Collect the adjectives on the board.

Lesson steps

1. Sort the adjectives into columns by syllable count and spelling pattern and elicit the rule for each column.
2. Practise the irregular forms with a quick chain drill: good, better, best; bad, worse, worst.
3. Give pairs a simple bar chart and ask them to write four comparisons, including one superlative and one as ... as sentence.
4. Introduce the more ... the pattern and have learners complete six cause-and-effect sentences.

Extension

Learners write a Task 1 summary paragraph for a chart of transport use, with at least three different ways to show a difference.

Answer key

1. b) faster. Fast has one syllable, so the comparative adds -er. Than shows it is a comparative.
2. a) the largest. Large is short, so the superlative is largest, with the before it.
3. b) more flexible. Flexible has three syllables, so use more. Most is for a superlative.
4. Part 2: *is more cheaper* → **is cheaper**. Cheap is a short adjective, so the comparative is cheaper. Do not add more as well.
5. Cycling is healthier than driving. Healthy changes to healthier, so more is not needed.
6. She is taller than her brother. Tall is a short adjective, so use taller and do not add more.
7. a) the most. A superlative of a long adjective needs the most, and of all the cities shows the group. More would need than, and very would need a in front of it.
8. b) higher. This pattern needs a comparative form after each the: the higher, the faster.

9. Part 3: *most biggest* → **biggest**. Big is short, so the superlative is biggest. One of the is followed by a superlative.

10. a) as. The pattern is as + adjective + as. Than is used with a comparative form.

Questions learners often ask

When do I use -er and when do I use more? Use -er with most one-syllable adjectives and more with adjectives of three or more syllables. With two syllables, check a dictionary if you are not sure.

Is it farther or further? Both are used for distance. Further is also used for extra or more, as in further information.

Do I use the before a superlative? Yes. The superlative almost always takes the: the largest, the most useful.

What is the opposite of more? Use less with adjectives, as in less expensive, or the least for a superlative. For countable nouns, use fewer.

Sources

- Swan, M. (2016). Practical English Usage (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S. and Finegan, E. (1999). Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English. Longman.

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