Comparative and Superlative Adjectives

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

\[ h \text{ (consonant)} + o \text{ (single vowel)} + t \text{ (second consonant)} \]

Comparative form: hotter

\[ h \text{ (consonant)} + o \text{ (single vowel)} + tt \text{ (doubled second consonant)} + \text{er (comparative suffix)} \]

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Comparative</th>
<th>Superlative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fast</td>
<td>faster</td>
<td>fastest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cheap</td>
<td>cheaper</td>
<td>cheapest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fresh</td>
<td>fresher</td>
<td>freshest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>big</td>
<td>bigger</td>
<td>biggest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sad</td>
<td>sadder</td>
<td>saddest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Comparative</th>
<th>Superlative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gentle</td>
<td>gentler</td>
<td>gentlest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clumsy</td>
<td>clumsier</td>
<td>clumsiest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>happy</td>
<td>happier</td>
<td>happiest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anxious</td>
<td>more anxious</td>
<td>most anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>polite</td>
<td>more polite</td>
<td>most polite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Three Syllables or More**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Comparative</th>
<th>Superlative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>important</td>
<td>more important</td>
<td>most important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attractive</td>
<td>more attractive</td>
<td>most attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>embarrassed</td>
<td>more embarrassed</td>
<td>most embarrassed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Comparative</th>
<th>Superlative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>better</td>
<td>best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bad</td>
<td>worse</td>
<td>worst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>little</td>
<td>less</td>
<td>least</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>much</td>
<td>more</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>far</td>
<td>farther/further</td>
<td>farthest/furthest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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