

Adjectives and adverbs: comparative and superlative forms

Comparatives: -er vs more/less...than

- A** We usually add **-er** to one-syllable adjectives and adverbs to make their comparative form. However, we use **more + adjective** –
- ☆ with one-syllable past participle adjectives (see Unit 69) such as **bored**, **creased**, **pleased**, **worn**
 - After I'd ironed my shirt it looked **more creased** than before. (*not ...creaseder...*)
 - ☆ with **fun**, **real**, **right** and **wrong**:
 - I expected the film to be rather dull, but I couldn't have been **more wrong**. (*not ...wronger.*)
 - ☆ when we are comparing two qualities:
 - 'Don't you think Carl was brave to go bungee jumping?' 'Personally, I thought he was **more mad than brave**.'
 - Although the paint was called 'Sky blue', I thought it was **more green than blue**.
We can also use '...he wasn't so much *brave as mad*' and '...it was *blue rather than green*'.
- We can sometimes use **more** as an alternative to the **-er** form to emphasise the comparison:
- You might think it's dark here but it's **more dark** in the cellar. (*or ...darker...*)
- Other adjectives used like this include **clear**, **cold**, **fair**, **rough**, **soft**, **true**.

- B** Some adjectives with two syllables are most commonly used with **more/less**, particularly **participle adjectives** (e.g. **worried**, **boring**); **adjectives ending in -ful and -less** (e.g. **careful**, **careless**); **afraid**, **alert**, **alike**, **alone**, **ashamed**, **aware**; and some other adjectives, including **active**, **cautious**, **certain**, **complex**, **direct**, **eager**, **exact**, **formal**, **frequent**, **modern**, **special**, **recent**. Most two-syllable adjectives ending **-y**, **-ow**, **-er** and **-ure** can take either an **-er** or the **more + adjective** form, although the **-er** form is more frequently used.

Some adjectives (such as **complete**, **equal**, **favourite**, **ideal**, **perfect**, **unique**) have a comparative or superlative meaning so they are not often used with **-er/-est** or **more/less/most/least**. However, we can use comparative or superlative forms for special emphasis or for a particular communicative purpose:

- The weather today was good, but **less perfect** than yesterday.

Superlatives

- C** We usually use **the**, a possessive form (with **-s**), or a possessive pronoun before a superlative adjective or adverb. In informal contexts we sometimes leave out **the** before an **-est** or **most + adjective** superlative after a linking verb, particularly when the superlative is at the end of a sentence:

- 'Why did you go by bus?' 'It was **(the) cheapest**.'
- Which was **(the) most expensive**?

However, we can't leave out **the** when we go on to say what group of things is being compared:

- 'Why did you buy these oranges?' 'They were **the cheapest ones I could find**.' (*not They were cheapest ones...*)

When **most + adjective/adverb** is used without **the**, **most** means something like 'very':

- Did you see how she looked at you? It was **most peculiar**. (= very peculiar)
- I checked the form **most carefully** (= very carefully) but didn't notice the mistake.

- D** After a superlative we use **of + a plural noun phrase** to name the objects being compared:

- John's **the oldest of my three brothers**.

Notice that we can put the **of-phrase** at the beginning to emphasise it:

- **Of my three brothers**, John's **the oldest**.

When we give the location or context within which the comparison is made we usually use **in + a singular noun phrase**:

- It was **the tallest tree in the forest**. (*not ...the tallest tree of the forest.*)

72.1 Underline the correct or more likely alternative. If both are possible, notice the difference between them. (A)

- 1 It was almost as if the wolf was *more scared/ scareder* of us than we were of it.
- 2 The river was *more deep/ deeper* than I expected so I decided to turn back.
- 3 I think I'd describe her as *more pretty/ prettier* than beautiful.
- 4 He had always seemed unfriendly, but now they were alone he seemed even *more cold/ colder*.
- 5 I bought this tennis racket because it's *more strong/ stronger*.
- 6 As a politician I often receive threats, but some are *more real/ realer* than others.
- 7 There were two routes up the hill, but as we had lots of time we took the *more long/ longer, more winding/ windinger* one.
- 8 Sam isn't a bad boy really. He's *more naughty/ naughtier* than dishonest.
- 9 Although a different speaker began to talk, I felt even *more bored/ boreder* than before.
- 10 The exam was *more hard/ harder* than I thought it would be.
- 11 We need to take responsibility for elderly neighbours, and in a cold winter like this it is *more true/ truer* than ever.
- 12 If the critics were wrong about Willis's first novel, they couldn't have been *more right/ righter* about her second.

72.2 Complete the sentences with an appropriate comparative adjective, using an -er or more + adjective form. Indicate where both forms are possible. (B)

alert	clever	complex	dirty	exciting	pleasant
powerful	recent	useless	wealthy	worried	

- 1 I may not be much of a cook, but Brian is even in the kitchen than I am.
- 2 Most research in this area uses simple interviews, but we used a methodology.
- 3 I didn't do well at school, and my fellow students all seemed than me.
- 4 The film starts slowly, but gets after the first half hour.
- 5 Neil is already rich, but his aim in life seems to be to become even
- 6 I was concerned when John didn't phone to say he'd be late, but I was even when he didn't come at all that night.
- 7 'This painting is from the 17th century.' 'Really? It looks than that.'
- 8 The walk was quite enjoyable, but if the sun had been shining it would have been
- 9 When I took the washing out of the machine it looked than when it went in.
- 10 For an extra \$500 you could buy a much motorbike.
- 11 Curiously, many people say they feel mentally if they eat very little for a day.

72.3 Put brackets around the if it can be left out in these sentences. (C)

- 1 It was the sweetest orange I'd eaten for ages.
- 2 Ann and Clara were both excellent musicians, but Clara was the most creative.
- 3 He's the fastest runner in his class.
- 4 We get lots of birds in our garden, but blackbirds are the most common.
- 5 'Shall we go by train or car?' 'Well, going by bus is actually the easiest.'

72.4 Complete the sentences with in or of. (D)

- 1 The building is said to be the highest Europe.
- 2 The Democrats are the smallest the four main political parties.
- 3 The hotel enjoys the most spectacular setting any on the south coast.
- 4 For many people, it is the most important day the whole year.
- 5 She's without doubt the best swimmer my school.

Key to Exercises

71.3

- ✓
- ...to me in a friendly way/
manner/ fashion.
- ✓ (or ...fine...)
- ...flatly refused.
- ✓ ('...very clear' is also possible
in informal contexts)
- ... in a cowardly way/ manner/
fashion...
- ...justly renowned.
- ...slowly turned...
- 'thinly' is grammatically correct,
but some people would use
'thin' in informal contexts
- ...loudly applauded...

UNIT 72

72.1

- more scared
- deeper *or* more deep (for
emphasis)
- more pretty
- colder *or* more cold (for
emphasis)
- stronger
- more real
- longer; more winding
- more naughty
- more bored
- harder
- truer *or* more true (for emphasis)
- more right

72.2

- more useless
- more complex
- more clever *or* cleverer (more
usual)
- more exciting
- more wealthy *or* wealthier
(more usual)
- more worried
- more recent
- more pleasant *or* pleasanter
(more usual)
- more dirty *or* dirtier (more usual)
- more powerful
- more alert

72.3

'the' can be left out in 2, 4 and 5.

72.4

- in
- of
- of
- in *or* of (both are possible)
- in

UNIT 73

73.1

- The Downtown Hotel is not such
a pleasant place to stay as the
Strand Hotel. *or* The Downtown
Hotel is not as pleasant a place
to stay as the Strand Hotel.
- The President's address to the
nation is as important a speech
as he is ever likely to make in
his career.

- It wasn't such a big problem as
I first thought. *or* It wasn't as
big a problem as I first thought.
- Theresa's dog is as ferocious an
animal as I've ever seen.
- She's not such a fluent Greek
speaker as she claims to be. *or*
She's not as fluent a Greek
speaker as she claims to be.

73.2

- | | |
|--------------|----------------|
| 1 as many as | 5 as little as |
| 2 as few as | 6 as few as |
| 3 as much as | 7 as little as |
| 4 As many as | 8 as much as |

73.3

- + a Her handwriting was so
untidy as to be nearly illegible.
- + e The bookcase was so heavy
as to be almost impossible to
move.
- + c The CD was so badly
scratched as to be unplayable.
- + f The plot of the novel was so
complicated as to be
completely incomprehensible.
- + b The difference between the
results was so small as to be
insignificant.

73.4

- How serious an injury
- as serious as
- bad enough to
- ✓ *or* not as fit as
- not such a good player as *or* not
as good a player as
- go so far as to say
- sufficiently well *or* well enough
- as speedy a recovery as possible

UNIT 74

74.1

- I expect Sue to win the race
easily.
- He regretted missing the concert
greatly. *or* He **greatly** regretted
missing the concert.
- I **secretly** hated playing the
piano... (more likely than 'I
hated playing the piano secretly,
although my parents thought I
loved it.' This would mean that
my parents thought I loved
playing the piano secretly.)
- He **calmly** started to walk
across... *or* He started to walk
calmly across...
- She **kindly** offered to do the
work.
- Ray **hurriedly** finished speaking
and sat down. *or* Ray finished
speaking **hurriedly** and sat down.
- I **simply** don't remember putting
it down.
- We look forward to hearing
from you **soon**.
- They **deliberately** tried to ignore
me. *or* They tried to ignore me
deliberately.
- I don't pretend to understand
the instructions **completely**.

74.2

- She waited nervously until her
name was called. (manner +
time)
- The road climbed steeply
through the mountains. (*more
likely than* ...through the
mountains steeply) (manner +
place)
- As a punishment she had to be
at school early for the next two
weeks. (adverb + prepositional
phrase; both time)
- As I left, I locked the door
securely. (object + adverb)
- We're travelling around
Australia during the summer.
(place + time)
- The house is by the river, just
downstream from the bridge.
(adverb + prepositional phrase;
both place)
- She was able to describe
accurately the exact details of
the house where she had lived as
a baby. (adverb + long object)
- In hospital she had to lie for a
week with her right leg
suspended in mid air. (time
(short) + manner (long))
- He swam rapidly for a few
minutes and then got out of the
pool. (manner + time)
- If you leave now, you should be
at home by nine o'clock. (place
+ time)
- They enjoyed themselves
immensely at the party. (object
+ manner + place)

74.3

- ✓ *or* Next, vigorously beat the
eggs in a small bowl. (Both of
these are more likely than Next,
beat the eggs in a small bowl
vigorously).
- I thought I'd securely locked the
luggage. *or* I thought I'd locked
the luggage securely.
- I stopped playing tennis
regularly... (more likely)
- ✓ *or* Rafter was beaten easily in
the final./ Rafter was beaten in
the final easily.
- She always brings sandwiches
from home.
- No, they moved away last year.
- The local residents welcomed
warmly the decision... *or* The
local residents warmly
welcomed the decision...
- ✓

UNIT 75

75.1

- a I was brought up to earn
money **honestly**...
b **Honestly**, I'm perfectly
capable of putting up the
shelf myself.
- a She admitted **frankly**...
b **Frankly**, I went to sleep
during his lecture...