

A

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

Reminder → L7-L8

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:
 - 'Wasn't he brave to swim across?' 'I think 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 ...*)

Also: clear, cold, deep, 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**
- 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 (e.g. **complete**, **equal**, **favourite**, **ideal**, **perfect**, **unique**) have a comparative or superlative meaning so are not often used with **-er / more / less** or **-est / most / least**. However, we can use comparative or superlative forms for special emphasis:

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

C

Superlatives

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 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':

- 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:

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

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

- Of my three brothers**, Adam'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.*)

Exercises

72.1 Complete the sentences with a comparative adjective from the box, using an **-er** or **more + adjective** form. Use both if possible. **A**

deep hard long naughty pretty scared strong true

- 1 It was almost as if the wolf was of us than we were of it.
- 2 The river was than I expected so I decided to turn back.
- 3 I think I'd describe her as than beautiful.
- 4 I bought this tennis racket because it's
- 5 Sam isn't a bad boy really. He's than dishonest.
- 6 The exam was than I thought it would be.
- 7 We need to take responsibility for elderly neighbours, and in a cold winter like this it is than ever.
- 8 We took the path up the hill as the other one was very steep.



72.2 If necessary, correct or improve the comparative adjectives. **B**

- 1 I may not be much of a cook, but Nina is even ~~uselesser~~ in the kitchen than I am.
more useless
- 2 When I took the washing out of the machine it looked *dirtier* than when it went in.
- 3 A: The painting is from the 17th century.
B: Really? It looks *recenter* than that.
- 4 The film starts slowly, but gets *excitinger* after the first half hour.
- 5 Louis is already rich, but his aim in life seems to be to become even *more wealthy*.
- 6 All of us are unique, but some of us are *more unique* than others.
- 7 Most research in this area uses simple interviews, but we used a *complexer* methodology.
- 8 I didn't do well at school, and my fellow students all seemed *cleverer* than me.
- 9 For an extra \$500 you could buy a much *powerfuler* motorbike.
- 10 Curiously, many people say they feel mentally *alerter* if they eat very little for a day.

72.3 Put brackets around **the** if it can be omitted in these sentences. **C**

- 1 It was the sweetest orange I'd eaten for ages.
- 2 Anna, Beth and Clara were all 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 A: Shall we go by train, bus or car?
B: 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 Parmesan is perhaps the most famous all Italian cheeses.
- 4 For many people, it is the most important day the whole year.
- 5 She's without doubt the best swimmer my school.