

Comparative phrases and clauses

A We use **as + adjective / adverb + as** to say that something or someone is like something or someone else, or that one situation is like another:

- Was the film **as funny as** his last one? I came round **as quickly as** I could.

Negative forms of sentences like this can use either **not as** or **not so**. In formal speech and writing it is more common to use **less + adjective + than**:

- The gap between the sides is **not as / so wide as** it was. (*or ... is less wide than* it was.)

B If we put a singular countable noun between an adjective and the second **as**, we use **a / an** in front of the noun:

- Despite his disability, he tried to lead **as normal a life as** possible. (*not ... as normal life as ...*)

The negative form of sentences like this can use either **not as** or sometimes **not such**:

- It's **not as quiet a place** (*or ... not such a quiet place ...*) **as** it used to be.

Note that we use **not as + adjective + a / an + noun** but **not such a / an + adjective + noun**.

We can use **so, too** and **how** followed by an adjective in a similar way:

- It's not quite **so straightforward a problem as** it might at first seem.
 'Conspiracy' is perhaps **too strong a word**. **How big a piece** do you want?

C We also use **as much / many as** or **as little / few as** to say that a quantity or amount is larger or smaller than expected. **Many** and **few** are preferred before numbers; **much** and **little** are preferred with amounts (e.g. \$5, 20%) and distances (e.g. 3 metres):

- There are a small number of people involved, possibly **as few as** twenty.
 Prices have increased by **as much as** 300%.

D We can use **not + adjective / adverb + enough + to-infinitive** to mean that there isn't as much as is necessary to do something:

- I'm not **tall enough to reach**. He didn't speak **loudly enough to be heard**.

We can use **sufficiently** before adjectives to express a similar meaning to **enough**. **Sufficiently** is often preferred in more formal contexts:

- She didn't play **sufficiently well** to qualify. (*or ... well enough to qualify.*)

E We can use **too + adjective / adverb + to-infinitive** to mean 'more than necessary, possible, etc.' to do something:

- They arrived **too late to get** seats. It moved **too fast to see** it clearly.
 The suitcase was **too small (for him) to get** all his clothes in.

In rather formal English we can use **too + adjective + a / an + noun**:

- I hope you haven't had **too tiring a day**. (*not ... a too tiring day.*)

(In a less formal style we might say 'I hope your day hasn't been too tiring.')

F We can use **so + adjective / adverb + that-clause** to say that something existed or happened to such a degree that a specified result occurred (see also Unit 81):

- It's **so simple that** even I can do it. He came in **so quietly that** I didn't hear him.

Less often we use **so + adjective / adverb + as + to-infinitive** with a similar meaning. Compare:

- The difference was **so small that** it wasn't worth arguing about. *and*
 The difference was **so small as to not be** worth arguing about. (= Because the difference was so small, it wasn't worth arguing about)

We can use **go so / as far as + to-infinitive** to talk about actions that are surprising or extreme:

- One furious woman **went so / as far as to throw** tomatoes at the minister.

Exercises

73.1 Complete these sentences with **as ... as** or **not as / such ... as** (or both if possible). Use the words in brackets and add any other necessary words. **B**

- 1 It's not such a polluted city now as / not as polluted a city now as it was ten years ago. (*not / polluted / city now*)
- 2 The Downtown Hotel is Strand Hotel. (*not / pleasant / place to stay*)
- 3 The President's address to the nation is he is ever likely to make in his career. (*important / speech*)
- 4 It was I first thought. (*not / big / problem*)
- 5 Theresa's dog is I've ever seen. (*ferocious / animal*)
- 6 She's she claims to be. (*not / fluent / Greek speaker*)

73.2 Complete these sentences with **as much as**, **as many as**, **as little as**, or **as few as**. **C**

- 1 When it was really hot I was having four showers a day.
- 2 The elephant population may soon fall to 1,000 from 5,000 ten years ago.
- 3 At the end of the 200-metre race there was 50 metres between the first and second runners.
- 4 5,000 people phoned in to complain about last night's TV programme.
- 5 Lit continuously, the life of a light bulb varies from two weeks to three months.
- 6 Some days there were three or four students at his lectures.
- 7 We don't use much electricity. Sometimes our bill is £40 a month.
- 8 The country spends 25% of its income on defence.

73.3 Join the sentences using **so + adjective + as + to-infinitive**. **F**

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|---|--|
| 1 The noise from the factory was loud. | a It was nearly illegible. |
| 2 Her handwriting was untidy. | b It was insignificant. |
| 3 The bookcase was heavy. | c It was unplayable. |
| 4 The CD was badly scratched. | d It prevented me sleeping. |
| 5 The plot of the novel was complicated. | e It was almost impossible to move it. |
| 6 The difference between the results was small. | f It was completely incomprehensible. |
- 1 + d The noise from the factory was so loud as to prevent me sleeping.

73.4 Correct any mistakes in the italicised parts of this interview with a football manager. **A-F**

- INTERVIEWER: (1) *How serious injury* is it? Is it (2) *so serious as* has been claimed in the newspapers? Some people are saying Franz Kahn will never play international football again.
- MANAGER: Well, it's certainly (3) *enough bad to* keep him out of football for at least six months. He's obviously (4) *not so fit as* he used to be and even he would admit that he's (5) *not such good player as* he was in his twenties. But I wouldn't (6) *go so far to say* that he'll never play for the national team again. I know him (7) *sufficiently well enough* to say that he will consider his future carefully before making any major decisions.
- INTERVIEWER: Well, we all wish him (8) *as speedy recovery as possible* ...

