

Comparatives and Superlatives

Background

Comparatives and superlatives are adjectives that relate objects and actions to other objects and actions. When using these, language learners must first identify the need for either an inflectional suffix (*-er* or *-est*) or the use of *more* or *most* (e.g. *more common*). Once the need is identified, correct word and sentence structures must be utilized. Because this skill uses knowledge of word relationships, word structures, and sentence structures, it can be said to truly combine semantics, morphology, and syntax.

There are few, though commonly used, irregular forms, such as better, best, worse, worst, further, furthest, elder, and eldest (Crystal, 1995). Relationships that express same degrees use “as”, (e.g. Your dog is as big as my dog.), and relationships that express lower degrees use “less” or “least” (e.g. My sister is less tall than yours.). Comparatives usually use either *than* or *but*, such as in *Andrew is tall, but Abe is taller, or Abe is taller than Andrew*. Superlatives almost always use the word *the* because they describe one thing.

One syllable adjectives usually take the *-er* or *-est* inflection. There are exceptions, such as *real*, *right*, and *wrong*. Two syllable adjectives often permit both forms of comparison. *Curlier* and *more curly* are acceptable ways of saying the same thing. Three syllable adjectives almost always require *more* or *most*. A common error in written language is the confusion caused by the acceptable forms of comparative and superlative adjectives (Parker and Riley, 1994). Tests that assess comparatives and superlatives include the OWLS, CASL, and the CELF-P.

Prerequisites: basic adjectives, /st/ blends, vocalic /r/ (note that functional *-er* production doesn't require precise /r/ production)

Hierarchy

High
Frequency
Adjectives

“basic concept” inflectional adjectives, such as big (bigger, best), small, fast, slow, high, low, long, easy, funny, open, scary, tired, sick, hungry, soft, hard, quiet, loud, huge, tiny, etc.
irregulars: good, (better, best), bad, many

Early
Elementary
Adjectives

inflectional adjectives, such as bright (brighter, brightest), clear, dark, fancy, long, plain, muddy, stormy, strange, careful, young, icy, spicy, weak, rainy, dry, wet, heavy, empty, brave, helpful, hollow, narrow, skinny, friendly, rich, wild, sweet, etc.

Longer
Elementary
Adjectives

three syllable adjectives, such as beautiful (more beautiful, most beautiful), delicious, excited, expensive, old-fashioned, annoying, impossible, talented, important, difficult, powerful, outstanding, comfortable, gigantic, wonderful, successful, etc.

Advanced
Adjectives

adorable (more adorable, most adorable), adventurous, aggressive, elegant, glamorous, magnificent, interesting, numerous, nutritious, miniature, cooperative, encouraging, obedient, doubtful, cautious, etc.