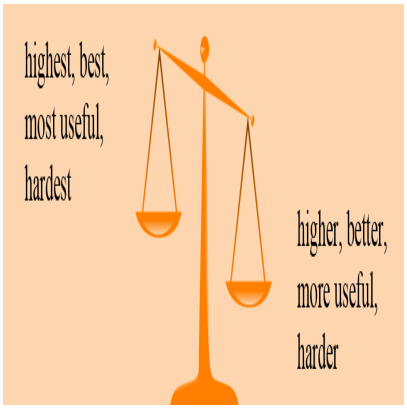

Description

Adjectives are words that describe another word. Comparatives are simply adjectives used to compare two things in terms of a specific shared quality. They take three forms—positive, comparative, and superlative. A positive adjective is used without a comparison, a comparative is used to compare one thing to another, and a superlative is used to compare one thing to a group.

The following sentences provide examples of each form:

Positive: My horse is *smart*.

Comparative: My horse is *smarter than* his horse.

Superlative: My horse is the *smartest* horse in the barn.

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You can see from the adjectives marked in *italics* in the above samples that each form of the adjective *smart* is different. The comparative form uses the *-er* suffix and is followed by the conjunction *than*; the superlative form uses the *-est* suffix.

You can also compare without changing the adjective form by using *as* in the sentence. When using *as* , you are showing equivalence.

> My horse is *as smart as* his horse.

> Greek food might be *as tasty as* Italian food.

Is that all there is to it? Do we simply just add one of these suffixes (and prepositions) to an adjective to make a comparison? Given that the English language can be difficult and the rules confusing, you might presume that the answer would be “no” and you would be correct. There are several rules for making comparisons.

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Forming Comparatives and Superlatives

It is not uncommon for both native and non-native English speakers to make mistakes when making comparisons; some avoid such mistakes by using online grammar checker or language correction tools, such as Trinka. However, some of the most common usages have rules that help. In most cases, comparatives and superlatives depend on the original form of the adjective used. For example, the comparative form will differ when the original form has more than one syllable, ends in a single vowel that is followed by a consonant, or has a silent “e” at the end. The following is a list of common rules.

- Monosyllable: Add suffixes *-er* and *-est* (smart, smarter, smartest).
- Two syllables: Usually add suffixes *-er* and *-est*, but there are exceptions.
- Two syllables with a negative prefix: These words can take either form as long as the wording is not awkward to pronounce (*un*happier or more *un*happy).
- Three or more syllables: Use *more* and *most* with the unchanged adjective form (annoying, more annoying, most annoying).
- Single vowel, followed by a single consonant: Double the final consonant and add a suffix (red, redder, reddest).
- Ends in silent -e: Drop the *e* and add a suffix (lame, lamer, lamest).
- Ends in -y: Replace the *y* with *i* and add the suffix (happy, happier, happiest).
- Ends in *-er*: Do not change the word form. Instead, use *more* or *most* (eager, more eager, most eager).
- Participle as adjective: These are words ending in -ing, -ed, -en, -d, -t, -n, or –ne. Use *more* or *most*; do not add a suffix (tired, more tired, most tired).
- Irregular adjective: These are adjectives that have completely different forms (good, better, best). A dictionary will help with these but, for the most part, you should attempt to memorize as many as possible.

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- Adverbs ending in -ly: Adverbs used to modify a verb (e.g., ran *quickly*) are also used as comparatives; use *more* and *most* (quickly, more quickly, most quickly).

These are examples of higher degrees of comparison (i.e., showing that something is better or the best), but there are also lower degrees of comparison. We don't add suffixes in these cases.

His horse is *less smart than*

He has *lesser* horse skills than others.

His horse is the *least smart* horse on the property.

Incomparable Adjectives

Some words cannot be compared by using suffixes, prepositions, or other comparative terms. These words describe an *absolute* condition. For example, an animal cannot be "more or less pregnant." It is either pregnant or it's not. If something is impossible, it can't be more or less impossible; if something is fatal, it can't be more or less fatal, and so on.

Exceptions and Changes to Rules

As indicated, some one- and two-syllable words don't follow the rules of forming comparatives and superlatives. In these cases, the use of *more* and *most* would be correct. For example, the words *fierce* and *sane* do not take a suffix. Likewise, the comparatives of *alive* and *distinct*, both two-syllable adjectives, would be *more alive* or *most distinct*. It would be incorrect and awkward to add -er or -est suffixes to these words.

Also at times, the English language rules change according to accepted or common usage. What might have been a strict rule at one point might not still apply if native speakers prefer one form to another. For example, it might be perfectly fine to add a suffix to the word *tender*; however, it also might sound awkward. In this case, common usage would be to add *more* or *most* before the adjective.

Correct Usage Is Important In Academic Writing

Given that researchers come from all over the world and that international journals are published in English, every attempt should be made to ensure correct English is used.

Comparative language is used throughout every study when comparing groups of subjects. In addition, results of a study are also often compared to those of other studies. Using the correct comparative and superlative adjective forms is necessary for the reader to correctly interpret your results. When in doubt, consult a good dictionary for correct usage.

You can use Trinka – world's first grammar checker and language correction tool which is specially designed for academic writing. With Trinka, you can easily use comparatives and superlatives correctly

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