

CHAPTER 17: USING MODIFIERS CORRECTLY

COMPARISON OF MODIFIERS

17a Modifiers change form to show comparison. The three degrees of comparison are *positive*, *comparative*, and *superlative*.

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
high	higher	highest
tearful	more tearful	most tearful
promptly	more promptly	most promptly

(1) One-syllable modifiers form their comparative and superlative degrees by adding *-er* and *-est*.

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
thick	thicker	thickest
dry	drier	driest

(2) Some two-syllable modifiers form their comparative and superlative degrees by adding *-er* and *-est*. Other two-syllable modifiers form their comparative and superlative degrees with *more* and *most*.

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
lovely	lovelier	loveliest
sticky	stickier	stickiest
awkward	more awkward	most awkward

(3) Modifiers that have more than two syllables form their comparative and superlative degrees with *more* and *most*.

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
generous	more generous	most generous
believably	more believably	most believably



A few two-syllable modifiers may use either *-er*, *-est* (*able*, *abler*, *ablest*) or *more*, *most* (*more able*, *most able*).

(4) Modifiers indicate less or least of a quality with the words *less* and *least*.

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
frequent	less frequent	least frequent
painfully	less painfully	least painfully



Some modifiers do not follow the regular methods of forming the comparative and superlative degrees.

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
bad	worse	worst
good	better	best
well	better	best
many	more	most

**EXERCISE 1 Forming the Degrees of Comparison of Modifiers**

On your own paper, write the forms for the comparative and superlative degrees of the modifiers below. Write the comparative and superlative degrees with *less* and *least*, too.

- EX. 1. original      more original; less original      most original; least original  
 2. fast              faster; less fast              fastest; least fast
1. fragile              6. exciting              11. courageous  
 2. quiet                7. loudly                12. lively  
 3. comfortable      8. humid                13. brief  
 4. friendly            9. wisely                14. crunchy  
 5. silly                10. happily             15. proud

**EXERCISE 2 Using Comparison Forms**

On your own paper, write five sentences comparing the items in each of the following pairs. Use the comparative forms of modifiers in your sentences.

- EX. 1. china dishes and paper plates  
 1. China dishes are stronger than paper plates.
1. spring and fall                              4. basketball and baseball  
 2. books and movies                            5. pens and pencils  
 3. personal computers and typewriters

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**USES OF COMPARATIVE AND SUPERLATIVE FORMS**

**17b Use the comparative degree when comparing two things. Use the superlative degree when comparing more than two.**

- COMPARATIVE This sweater is **heavier** than that one.  
Of the two cats, Muffin was the **more active**.  
This month is **less rainy** than last month was.
- SUPERLATIVE This sweater is the **heaviest** of all.  
Of the three cats, Muffin was the **most active**.  
This month was the **least rainy** I can remember.



In everyday conversation, people sometimes use the superlative degree when comparing two things: *Put your best foot forward*. In writing, however, you should always use the comparative degree when comparing two things.

**17c Include the word *other* or *else* when comparing one thing with others in the same group.**

- NONSTANDARD Hector can draw better than anyone in art class.  
[As a member of the art class, Hector cannot draw better than himself.]
- STANDARD Hector can draw better than anyone **else** in art class.

**17d Avoid double comparisons. A double comparison is incorrect because it contains both *-er* and *more* or *-est* and *most*.**

- NONSTANDARD The second exercise was more harder than the first one.  
STANDARD The second exercise was **harder** than the first one.
- NONSTANDARD Which bird has the most smallest beak?  
STANDARD Which bird has the **smallest** beak?

**17e Be sure your comparisons are clear.**

- UNCLEAR Tamara would rather read books than television.  
CLEAR Tamara would rather read books than **watch** television.

**EXERCISE 3 Revising Sentences by Correcting Modifiers**

Draw a line through the incorrect modifier in each of the following sentences. Write the correct comparative or superlative form above the sentence. Some sentences may be correct. *finer*

- EX. 1. Some people consider trust a ~~more fine~~ quality than loyalty.
1. Of my two closest friends, Carlos is the most trustworthy.