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ADJECTIVES - DEGREES OF COMPARISON & EXCEPTIONS

Adjectives

- The simplest way to explain adjectives is that they describe a noun.
- It gives us a better idea of the noun, by telling us its size, shape, age, colour, or other quality.
Example: That is a big tree.

How to order adjectives in English

If a sentence has more than one adjective, they are arranged by priority, wherein the adjectives that actively describe the noun come before the more neutral nouns.

1. Quantity or number
2. Quality or opinion
3. Size
4. Age
5. Shape
6. Color
7. Proper Adjective (often nationality, other place of origin, or material)
8. Purpose or qualifier

Example: I love that big, old, green, antique car that is parked at the end of the street.

Big describes the size of the car. Since, size is number 3 in the list, it comes before number (4) age (old) and (6) colour (green).

Degrees of Adjectives

There are three degrees of adjectives.

1. Positive Adjective
2. Comparative Adjective
3. Superlative Adjective

Positive Degree

Tom is tall a boy.

- In this sentence the word 'tall' is an adjective telling us how Tom is.
- There is no other person or thing in this sentence used to compare Tom with, but it is the general way of saying about persons, animals and things that they have some quality (here 'tallness') above average in general sense.

- The adjective word ‘tall’ is said to be in the “positive form”.
- This comparison is called “positive degree” comparison.

Comparatives

- One way to describe nouns (people, objects, animals, etc.) is by comparing them to something else.
- When comparing two things, you’re likely to use adjectives like smaller, bigger, taller, more interesting, and less expensive.
- Notice the -er ending, and the words more and less.

See the sentences below for an illustration of this common error:

Incorrect Use	His cat is more large than my dog.
Correct Use	His cat is larger than my dog.

So, what makes the first example wrong and the second right? There are a few rules that explain this:

- For adjectives that are just one syllable, add -er to the end (this explains the above example).
- For two-syllable adjectives not ending in -y and for all three-or-more-syllable adjectives, use the form “more + adjective.”
- For two-syllable adjectives ending in -y, change the -y to -i and add -er.

These simple rules make it easy to tell when you should add -er or -ier and when you should use “more + adjective.”

Examples:

Incorrect Use	This house is <u>excitinger</u> than ever.
Correct Use	This house is more exciting than ever.

Incorrect Use	Mike is <u>more funny</u> than Isaac.
Correct Use	Mike is funnier than Isaac.

Notice the spelling change for adjectives ending in -y: the comparative ends in -ier.

Incorrect Use	This book is <u>boringer</u> than the last one.
Correct Use	This book is more boring than the last one.

Incorrect Use	Advertising pressures women to be <u>more thin</u> .
Correct Use	Advertising pressures women to be <u>thinner</u> .

Superlatives

- When comparing more than two things, you'll likely use words and phrases like smallest, biggest, tallest, most interesting, and least interesting.
- Notice the -est ending and the words most and least.
- Make sure you use the proper ending or superlative adjective when forming these superlatives.

The examples below illustrate the correct form:

1	Martha is the elder of the four sisters.
2	If there were only two sisters, we could use the comparative elder here. Because there are four sisters, we need a superlative.
3	Martha is the eldest of the four sisters.
4	I think his last book is his least interesting; his third book was the most interesting.
5	That must be the weirdest play ever written.

- Remember that adjectives ending in -y change their spelling when -est is added.
- To form these superlatives, change the y to an i before adding the -est ending, as illustrated below:

Incorrect	That is the sleepiest puppy of the litter.
Correct	That is the sleepest puppy of the litter.

Forming Comparative and Superlatives of Irregular Adjectives

It's important to note that there are irregular adjectives (and adverbs) that you have to memorize because they don't follow the rules above. They are:

Adjective/Adverb	Comparative	Superlative
good/well	better	best
bad/badly	worse	worst
far	farther, further	the farthest, the furthest

little	less	least
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Here are some examples of these irregular words as comparatives and superlatives in context:

Examples:

1	Today I had the <u>best</u> time touring the city.
2	I went <u>farther</u> than my friend when we walked around the park.
3	You dance <u>better</u> than I do.
4	You bought the <u>least</u> attractive pair of moccasins at the thrift store.
5	He can run the <u>farthest</u> of his classmates, but that's only once around the track.
6	I do <u>badly</u> in math, but at least I'm not the <u>worst</u> .

Comparative and Superlative of "Handsome"

Besides the irregular words in the table above, one other unclear comparative/superlative choice is:

- Handsomer.
- More handsome.
- Handsomest/most handsome.
- The rules call for handsomer and handsomest, but usage has changed over time. Modern speakers prefer more handsome to handsomer, and there is an even split between handsomest and most handsome.
- Preferred usage typically follows what native speakers say, and the trend seems to be moving toward the simpler construction of more + adjective and the most + adjective.
- **Parallel Degree:** This comparison is used to show that the qualities of two items (adjectives or adverbs) talked about in the given sentence go parallel.
- If one quality (adjective or adverb) increases, the other quality (adjective or adverb) increases, and if one quality decreases, the other quality also decreases.
- Eg: The bigger the box, the heavier it is.

Forming Comparative and Superlatives of Various Adjectives

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
Big	Bigger	Biggest

Great	Greater	Greatest
Short	Shorter	Shortest
Old	Older	Oldest
Large	Larger	Largest
Happy	Happier	Happiest
Lucky	Luckier	Luckiest
Heavy	Heavier	Heaviest
Beautiful	More beautiful	Most beautiful
Horrible	More horrible	Most horrible
Good	Better	Best
Bad	Worse	Worst
Little	Less	Least
Far	Farther	Farthest

Rules for Degrees of Comparisons

Rule #1

While making comparisons between two things the comparative degree is used and not the superlative degree.

Example

Incorrect	He is the richest of the two brothers.
Correct	He is the richer of the two brothers.

As we can see in the examples, comparison is between two brothers thus comparative degree will be used.

Rich □ Richer □ Richest

Rule # 2

- If a choice has to be made between two persons or things the comparative degree will be used.

- Article 'the' will be used before the comparative degree and (of the) will be used after the comparative degree.

The structure will bethe + Comparative + of the.....

Examples

- Lucknow is the better of the two cities.
- MS Dhoni is the better of the two players.

Similarly, if the choice is to be made between more than two things or persons the superlative degree will be used.

The structure will bethe + Superlative degree + of the.....

Examples

- Rahul is the best of all the batsmen in the Indian cricket team.
- English is the easiest of all the languages taught in the school.

Rule # 3

If an adjective is to be used between "as.....as" and "so.....as" the adjective should be in positive degree.

Example:

- As.....as is used to show that something is equally good or bad.
- **Hisar is as hot as Ganganagar in May.**

Example:

- So.....as is used to show something is not as good or as bad.
- **Even with the aggressive marketing campaign, the response is not so good.**

Example:

- This rule is also applicable in adverbs.
- **Geeta danced as gracefully as Anita.**

Rule # 4

If two qualities are to be compared of the same person or thing then we don't use the comparative degree.

Comparative degree is used for comparison between two different things or persons.

Instead of using the comparative degree 'more', positive degree will be used.

Example - English needs more practice than other languages.

Rule # 5

In comparative degree 'than' is used. But for adjectives ending in 'ior' 'than' is not used, instead 'to' is used.

List of such adjectives is Superior, inferior, junior, senior, prior, anterior, posterior, exterior, interior etc.

Example

Incorrect	He was junior than me in college.
Correct	He was junior to me in college.

Rule # 6

If two adjectives are being used for the same noun or pronoun then the adjective should be in the same degree.

Example

Incorrect	India is the greatest and tolerant country.
Correct	India is a great and tolerant country.

Practice Questions

Directions: In the following question, one part of the sentence may have an error. Find out which part of the sentence has an error and select the option corresponding to it. If the sentence is free from error, select the 'No error' option.

Question 1

Gone are the days when nuclear weapons (A)/ were the only threat; humans have designed (B)/ far worst weapons now. (C)/ No error (D)

- 1) A
- 2) B
- 3) C
- 4) D

Correct Option: 3

Solution:

- The third part of the sentence is incorrect therefore; the right answer is option 3.
- The third part of the sentence is wrong because of the use of the adjective 'worst'. The sentence is comparing a present day situation with the past so the adjective used should be of a comparative degree instead of a superlative degree.
- 'Worst' is used to describe something that is beyond bad, eg., 'This is the worst meal I have ever had in my life.'
- Since the sentence calls for a comparative degree of the adjective 'bad', 'worse' should be used instead of 'worst'.
- Correct sentence: '*Gone are the days when nuclear weapons were the only threat; humans have designed far worse weapons now.*'

Question 2

Rohan has a (A)/ most unique collection (B)/ of wrist watches. (C)/ No error (D)

- 1) A
- 2) B
- 3) C
- 4) D

Correct Option: 2

Solution:

- Words like unique, major, minor, maximum, minimum, full, complete, perfect, round, etc. are already in their superlative form.
- So, they do not take any comparative or superlative degree of adjective.
- Thus, remove most from the sentence.
- Correct Sentence: "*Rohan has a unique collection of wrist watches.*"

Question 3

As soon as I entered the room (A)/ a black long snake hurled (B)/ into the bed sheet. (C)/ No error (D)

- 1) A
- 2) B
- 3) C
- 4) D

Correct Option: 2

Solution:

- Here, concept of adjective is brought under consideration.
- When adjectives of colour and size are used together in a sentence, then, following pattern is considered: - adjective of size -> adjective of colour.
- Thus, replace black long with long black.
- Correct Sentence: *“As soon as I entered the room, a black long snake hurled into the bed sheet.”*

Directions: Improve the bracketed part of the sentence. Four alternatives are given to the underlined part which will improve the meaning of the sentence. Choose the correct alternative and select the option corresponding to it. In case no improvement is needed, select the option corresponding to 'No improvement'.

Question 4

Bill Gates is once again (the rich person) in the world.

- 1) The richer person
- 2) The most richer person
- 3) The richest person
- 4) No improvement

Correct Option: 3

Solution:

- The sentence uses an incorrect form of adjective 'rich'.
- The correct form must be a superlative adjective i.e., 'richest'.
- Correct Sentence: *“Bill Gates is once again the richest person in the world.”*

Question 5

Raghu is a (coward) man who never takes any decision on his own.

- 1) cowardly man
- 2) coward men
- 3) cowardly woman
- 4) No improvement

Correct option: 1

Solution:

- Here, concept of adjective is brought under consideration.
- "Coward" is a noun and "man" is a noun. Hence, replace it with adjective cowardly.
- Correct sentence: *"Raghu is a cowardly man who never takes any decision on his own."*

Question 6

The higher the demand, (the more) the prices.

- 1) great
- 2) the greater
- 3) high
- 4) No improvement

Correct Option: 2

Solution:

- Clearly, comparative degree of adjective should be used.
- Since, 'higher' is given. So, to connect with it, similar type of degree should be used.
- Correct Sentence: *"The higher the demand, the greater the prices."*

Question 7

The 4th day of admissions at the University started (with most students) cancelling their admissions as compared to new enrollments.

- 1) with many students
- 2) with more students

- 3) with all students
- 4) No improvement

Correct Option: 2

Solution:

- The sentence is compares enrolments and cancellations (...as compared to...) in the admission process which has already started and is still going on.
- Here, two things are compared hence comparative adjective 'more than' will be used.
- In the above example superlative degree is used (most) which is wrong as it is used when a particular thing is compared with a group (or class) of things.
- For eg: It rained the most in July as compared to other months.
- In option 1, 'many' is just a simple numeral adjective and not comparing two things, hence, it will make a wrong sentence.
- Option 3, is also wrong as 'all' is the wrong adjective.
- Correct sentence: *"The 4th day of admissions at the University started with more students cancelling their admissions as compared to new enrolments."*

Directions: Read the following sentence and choose the degree of the underlined adjective.

Question 8

Dhiraj claimed, "I am the funniest out of all the comedians."

- 1) Positive
- 2) Comparative
- 3) Superlative
- 4) None of these

Correct Option: 3

Solution:

- A positive adjective is used in order to describe. For example: "This is good soup" and "I am funny."
- A comparative adjective is used to compare two things (and is often followed by the word than). For example: "This soup is better than that salad" or "I am funnier than her."
- A superlative adjective is used to compare three or more things. For example: "This is the best soup in the whole world" or "I am the funniest out of all the other bloggers."

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