When comparing two things one uses the comparative (previous lesson); however, for comparisons in larger groups, you must use the superlative. The superlative designates extremes: the best, the first, the worst, the last, etc.

A. It is the word "most" or the ending "−−est" that designates the superlative.

- He is the most efficient worker we have.
- That is the poorest family in the neighborhood.

B. The compared term (adjective or adverb) will be preceded by the definite article:

- He works the fastest of any student I know.
- She is the tallest woman in town.

C. Unlike the comparative, the superlative is not followed by "than": instead, one uses "of," followed by the context of the comparison (although this context is sometimes implicit):

- It's the best day of my life!
- She works the best of the whole class.
- She's the one who arrived first.

Irregular forms

Monosyllabic adjectives (and several common two-syllable adjectives) take the ending "−−est" in superlatives of superiority, and thus will not use the adverb "most." However, these same adjectives will use "less," like other adjectives, in superlatives of inferiority:

young --> the youngest,   tall --> the tallest,   old --> the oldest

> If the adjective ends in "−−y" the "y" becomes "i":
- heavy --> the heaviest,   early --> the earliest,   busy --> the busiest,   healthy --> the healthiest,   chilly --> the chilliest

> If the adjective ends in "−−e" one adds only "−−st":
- wise --> the wisest,   large --> the largest,   simple --> the simplest,   late --> the latest,

> If the adjective ends in "single vowel + consonant," the consonant is doubled and one adds "−−est":
- red --> the reddest,   big --> the biggest,   thin --> the thinnest,   hot --> the hottest

> Some very common superlatives have irregular forms:
- good --> the best,   bad --> the worst,   far --> the farthest,

> Some adjectives exist only in superlative form:
- the first,   the last

TEST

Fill in the blanks with a comparative or a superlative:

a. Canada is (big) ______ than the USA but China is (populous) ______ country in the world.  b. We stayed at (cheap) ______ hotel in the town but my cousin's campsite was (cheap) ______ than our hotel.  c. January is generally (bad) ______ than December but February is (cold) ______ month.  d. English is (easy) ______ than German.  e. Chinese is (difficult) ______ language.  f. Heathrow is one of (busy) ______ airports in Europe.  g. My father thinks that the Beatles were (good) ______ than the Rolling Stones, but in my opinion, U2 is (great) ______ band.

ANSWERS:

Canada is (big) bigger than the USA but China is (populous) the most populous country in the world.  b. We stayed at (cheap) the cheapest hotel in the town but my cousin’s campsite was (cheap) cheaper than our hotel.  c. January is generally (bad) worse than December but February is (cold) the coldest month.  d. English is (easy) easier than German.  e. Chinese is (difficult) the most difficult language.  f. Heathrow is one of (busy) the busiest airports in Europe.  g. My father thinks that the Beatles were (good) better than the Rolling Stones, but in my opinion, U2 is (great) the greatest band.