

THE SUPERLATIVE

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.