
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Grammar

Comparatives and superlatives



NB This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute Grammar with me, Rob.

Sophie

And me, Sophie. Hello.

Rob

Today we're talking about comparatives and superlatives – what they are and how to use them.

Sophie

Yes, we use comparatives and superlatives to compare people and things. Listen carefully because, as usual, there is a quiz at the end of the show.

Rob

OK, we'll start with some examples of the comparative. So, Sophie, can you stand up, please.

Sophie

OK...

Rob

Right, look, back to back here. I'm taller than you.

Sophie

But I'm thinner than you!

Rob

Good point. The sentences **I'm taller than you** and **I'm thinner than you** both use the comparative form.

Sophie

We use comparatives to compare two people or things that are different in some way.

Rob

Listen again to the examples we've just used: where does the word **than** come?

Neil

I'm taller than you.
I'm thinner than you.

Sophie

Than comes after the comparative adjective. We usually use **than** in comparative sentences.

Rob

But not always, for example, I can ask: **Who is taller – you or me?**

Sophie

Now, there are different ways to make the comparative form: For short words, just add 'er'. That's spelled E – R. So **tall** becomes **taller** ...

Rob

...**thin** becomes **thinner** ...

Sophie

Adjectives like **happy, funny, easy**... that end in the sound /i/ [phonemic sound 'y'], spelled with a 'y', add 'ier', spelled: I – E – R.

Rob

...so **happy** becomes **happier**...

Sophie

...**easy** becomes **easier**. An example, please Neil.

Neil

English is *easier* than Chinese.

Rob

Not if you're Chinese, though! Now, adjectives that have two or more syllables but don't end in /i/ (spelled 'y'), use 'more'. Neil has some examples.

Neil

A tablet is more useful than a laptop.
The film of 'The Hobbit' is more exciting than the book.

Rob

'Useful' has two syllables and 'exciting' has three, so we say **more useful** and **more exciting**.

IDENT

6 Minute Grammar from the BBC.

Sophie

And we're talking about comparatives and superlatives. We've seen how to use and make comparatives...

Rob

Now we're going to tell you what superlatives are and how to use them. Sophie, are you good at geography?

Sophie

I'll have a go.

Rob

OK. Here's a question for you: What's the longest river in the world?

Sophie

Well, the Nile is a very long river, but I think that the longest river in the world is the Amazon.

Rob

And... you're right! It is the Amazon. 'The longest river' is a superlative. We use superlative forms to compare one person or thing with several others in a group. We often use them to say which thing or person is the greatest, the biggest...

Sophie

...the most beautiful, the best... in some way.

Rob

To make the superlative of short words like **high, deep, tall**, add 'est'. That's spelled E-S-T.

Sophie

So, the **highest** mountain... the **deepest** ocean, the **tallest** person...

Rob

And... remember to put 'the' before the adjective. So it's: *I'm the tallest person in my family.*

Sophie

Now for longer adjectives, with two or more syllables, we use **most**. Rob, who is the most famous actor in the world?

Rob

Well, there are many, aren't there, but I think Brad Pitt is the most famous actor in the world.

Sophie

...'the most famous actor'. So it's **the + most + adjective**.

Rob

For adjectives that end in /i/ – spelled ‘y’ – like **funny**, and **happy**, we add 'iest' – that's I-E-S-T. Here's an example.

Neil

The funniest show on TV is 'The Simpsons'.

Sophie

Now, finally, look out for the irregular comparatives and superlatives.

Neil

My iPhone 5 was better than my iPhone 4, but the iPhone 6 is the best phone on the market now, in my opinion.

Rob

The comparative form of **good** is **better** and the superlative form is **best**.

Sophie

The comparative of **bad** is **worse**.

Rob

...and the superlative is **worst**. Listen to these examples:

Neil

Winters have been bad the last few years. 2012 was worse than 2011, but 2013 was the worst winter since records began.

Sophie

Now for the quiz. I'll give you an adjective and a sentence and you have to complete the gap with a comparative or superlative.

Rob

OK. Number 1: the word is OLD. Jenny is ten and Simon is fifteen, so Simon is _____ than Jenny.

Sophie

And the answer is: older. Simon is older than Jenny.

Rob

Next word: BEAUTIFUL. The Taj Mahal is the _____ building I've ever seen.

Sophie

And the answer is: most beautiful. The Taj Mahal is the most beautiful building I've ever seen.

Rob

Final word: GOOD. Using BBC Learning English is the _____ way to improve your English.

Sophie

Best. Using BBC Learning English is the best way to improve your English.

Rob

There's lots more about this on our website at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again for more 6 Minute Grammar soon.

Both

Bye.