

### 1.3b More on Adjectives: Comparative and Superlative

**key words:** adjectives, comparative, superlative, variation

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.1a, Explain the function of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in general and their functions in particular sentences. <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/3/1/a>

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.1g, Form and use comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs, and choose between them depending on what is to be modified. <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/3/1/g>

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.2g, Consult reference materials, including beginning dictionaries, as needed to check and correct spellings. <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/3/2/g>

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.4.3c Differentiate between contexts that call for formal English (e.g., presenting ideas) and situations where informal discourse is appropriate (e.g., small-group discussion). <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/4/3/c>

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Adjectives form their comparative forms by adding either *-er* to the adjective or *more* before the adjective. (See Test 1 in Lesson 1.3.) And they form their superlative forms by adding either *-est* to the adjective or *most* before the adjective.

How do you know whether to use *-er* or *more*, or to use *-est* or *most*? Mostly, you just know. Show how the list of adjectives in the left column forms their comparative and superlative forms by writing those forms in the appropriate column. Two are done for you. Some may work both ways.

adjective	comparative <i>-er</i> /superlative <i>-est</i>	comparative <i>more</i> /superlative <i>most</i>
big	bigger, biggest	
beautiful		more beautiful, most beautiful
large		
lovely		
soft		
expensive		
hot		
purple		
pretty		
cold		
curious		
noble		
pretty		
small		
happy		
important		
scruffy		
common		
friendly		

Can you figure out a pattern of which words take which comparative and superlative?

For those that you think sound ok either way, check a dictionary to see what it suggests.

[Teacher's Note: Generally, one-syllable adjectives take *-er/-est*, and three-syllable or more adjectives take *more* or *most*. But adjectives with two syllables tend to vary in whether they take *-er/-est* or *more/most*. Some take either form, and the situation determines the usage. For example, one will see *commoner* and *more common*, depending on which sounds better in the context. Two-syllable adjectives that end in the "ee" sound, most often spelled with *y*, generally take *-er/-est*, for example,

*pretty/prettier/prettiest* is better than *more pretty, most pretty*

Longer adjectives, especially those from Greek and Latin, and including most adjectives with three or more syllables, require *more* and *most*.

*more/most expensive, more/most satisfying, more/most satisfactory*

Adjectives which end in *-ous* do not take *-er/-est*: *furiouser, hideouser*, though *curiouser* is a curiosity. It is found in both *Webster's Third* and the *Oxford English Dictionary Second Edition*, probably just because Lewis Carroll used it in fun in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*:

"Curiouser and curiouser!" cried Alice (she was so much surprised, that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English); "now I'm opening out like the largest telescope that ever was! Good-bye, feet!" (for when she looked down at her feet, they seemed to be almost out of sight, they were getting so far off).

What about *funner*? If it is generally the case that one-syllable adjectives take *-er* and *-est* rather than *more* and *most*, then why is there a longstanding prohibition against *funner* and *funnest*? It's not really clear where this anti-*funner* rule came from. It may stem from the fact that long ago, *fun* used to be a noun only. It's still a noun: *much fun was had by all*. So the prohibition against *funner* and *funnest* seems to have come about as the word was in transition from being a noun to also being an adjective. Now, *fun* acts like any other (one-syllable) adjective with the forms *fun, funner, and funnest* (just like *tall, taller, tallest*). It's probably only a matter of time before these comparative and superlative forms become perfectly acceptable. So don't simply tell your students that *funner* isn't a word – it is! It could be an opportunity to talk about it not being completely acceptable in formal writing, but that it is quite acceptable in informal discourse.]