
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Grammar

Comparatives and superlatives



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Finn

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

Catherine

And me, Catherine. Hello.

Finn

Today we're talking about comparatives and superlatives. So, let's start with comparatives. We use them to compare one thing or person with another. Catherine, how was your journey to work this morning?

Catherine

Ok. Well, my journey to work wasn't great, actually. I woke up later than usual, so I took the bus because it's quicker than walking. And it's easier than cycling, too. But the traffic was much busier than normal and we went slower and slower and people became more and more impatient. And the slower the bus went, the more impatient they became.

Finn

You poor thing. But, lots of comparatives there in your story - we had **later** and **quicker**: Catherine woke up **later** than usual and she said the bus is **quicker** than walking.

Catherine

I did. And to make the comparative form of short adjectives or adverbs, we just add the letters **-e-r**. So, **quick, quicker**. But if the word already ends in **-e**, we just add the letter **-r**. **late, later**.

Finn

Remember that we often use the word **than** in comparative sentences, but sometimes we can leave it out, for example in the question **Which is quicker - the bus or the train?**

Catherine

I also said that the bus is **easier than cycling** and **the traffic was much busier than normal**. For adjectives and adverbs that end in the letter **-y** and the sound **ee**, make comparatives by losing the letter **-y** and adding the letters **-i-e-r**. So the comparative of **easy** is **easier**.

Finn

... and **busy** becomes **busier**. In fact, Catherine said the traffic was **much** busier. Now, we can use **much** or **a lot** before an adjective or adverb to emphasise the difference. **Much busier; a lot easier.**

Catherine

To make comparative forms of most adjectives and adverbs with two or more syllables, we use **more**.

Finn

For example, **impatient** has three syllables: **im-pa-tient**, so the comparative of **impatient** is **more impatient**.

Catherine

That's right and to emphasise how something changes, we can repeat comparatives, or the word **more** with **and** in the middle, like this.

Finn

The bus went **slower and slower** and people became **more and more impatient**.

Catherine

Don't remind me. Here's another way to use comparatives. Listen to this sentence: **the slower the bus went, the more impatient the people became.**

Finn

I'm not surprised. Here Catherine used two different comparatives - **slower** and **more impatient** - with **the**, to say how one thing changes when something else changes. **The slower the bus went, the more impatient the people became.** Really not a good morning was it, Catherine?

Catherine

Not at all. And it got **worse** when the bus broke down!

Finn

Oh really? Oh no, but perfect for us because **worse** is the comparative adjective of bad. It is irregular. The comparative adverb is **badly**. Catherine's morning went **badly**.

Catherine

Very badly. And the comparative of both **good** and **well** is also irregular: it's **better**.

IDENT

6 Minute Grammar from the BBC.

Catherine

And we're talking about comparatives and superlatives.

Finn

Let's look at superlative adjectives and adverbs. They help us compare one person or thing with **several** others. So, Catherine what is **the quickest** way for you to get to work?

Catherine

Well, usually the bus is **the quickest**, but not today. But walking is **the most reliable** way and it's also **the easiest**.

Finn

OK, we make superlatives in a similar way to comparatives ...

Catherine

... but the ending for short words is **-e-s-t**.

Finn

So **quick** becomes **the quickest** ...

Catherine

... and we use **most** for words with two or more syllables.

Finn

So the superlative of **reliable** is **the most reliable**.

Catherine

That's right. For two-syllable words ending in **-y**, change the **y** to **i** and add **-e-s-t**, so **easy** becomes **the easiest**.

Finn

Don't forget to put **the** before a superlative adjective or adverb, so it's walking is **the best** way to get to work...

Catherine

... though we can use possessive adjectives instead of the word **the**, like this:

Finn

My best friend is getting married today.

Catherine

And did you spot the irregular superlative - **best**? This is the superlative form of **good** and **well**.

Finn

... and the irregular superlative of **bad** is **worst**.

Catherine

Now for the quiz. Which is correct? a) Your internet connection is faster than mine or b) Your internet connection is fastest than mine.

Finn

It's a).

Catherine

Good. And the last one, a) I hope I have a better journey home tonight or b) I hope I have a best journey home tonight.

Finn

Well, it's a). And we do hope you have a much better journey home tonight, Catherine.

Catherine

Thank you.

Finn

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

Both

Bye.