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Comparatives and Superlatives

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Comparatives and superlatives are words we use to describe and compare things. Comparatives and superlatives can be adjectives (words that modify or change nouns) or adverbs (words that modify or change verbs and adjectives). Comparatives compare two things while superlatives compare three or more things. The superlative reflects the “most” of something, its highest degree or quality.

Examples of Comparatives and Superlatives

Most comparatives end in *-er* or *-ier*, although some start with “*more*” or “*less*” (e.g., The test is more difficult than the quiz). Most superlatives end in *-est* or *-iest*, although some start with “*most*” or “*least*” (e.g., The final exam is most difficult). Some typical examples, with the superlative highlighted, are below:

- loud, louder, **loudest**
- happy, happier, **happiest**
- cold, colder, **coldest**
- high, higher, **highest**
- big, bigger, **biggest**

As well, some comparatives and superlatives do not fit the typical rules for construction. These include: *good, better, best* and *bad, worse, worst*.

Ways to Teach Comparatives and Superlatives

- **Draw pictures of objects.** Have students draw pictures to “see” comparatives and superlatives. To start, have them draw familiar objects like shapes—*big circle, bigger circle, biggest circle*. To increase the difficulty, have them draw more abstract items—*cold, colder, coldest*.
- **Put real objects next to each other.** Show actual objects next to each other for students to compare them. For example, place a pillow (*soft*), marshmallow (*softer*), and cotton ball (*softest*) next to each other.
- **Fill-in-the-blanks.** Give students sentences to fill-in-the blanks. For example—*The stream is wide. The river is _____ (wider). The ocean is the _____ (widest).*
- **Put pictures in order.** Give students two to three pictures of objects. Have them put the pictures in order from most to least (e.g., *sandwich—thickest, thicker, thick*) or least to most (*thick, thicker, thickest*). An alternative is to have them pick out one picture you say (*thickest*). Or, have them compare two pictures (*thick vs. thicker*).
- **Act out the words.** Ask students to “act out” different comparatives and superlatives such as *happy, happier, and happiest*.

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