

NOTE *More* and *most* have other uses in which they are not equivalent to the comparison inflections. Notice the paraphrases in the following two uses of *more*:

He is *more than happy* about it. ['He is happy about it to a degree that is not adequately expressed by the word *happy*.']

He is *more good than bad*. ['It is more accurate to say that he is good than that he is bad.']

She is *more keen than wise*. ['She is keen rather than wise.']

Most may have an intensifying meaning, as in *Della is a most efficient publisher*.

Comparison of adjectives

Irregular forms of comparison

7.41 A small group of highly frequent adjectives have comparative and superlative forms with stems which are different from the base:

<i>good</i>	~ <i>better</i>	~ <i>best</i>
<i>bad</i>	~ <i>worse</i>	~ <i>worst</i>
<i>far</i>	{ ~ <i>further</i>	~ <i>furthest</i>
	{ ~ <i>farther</i>	~ <i>farthest</i>

NOTE [a] *Old* is regularly inflected as *older* ~ *oldest*. In attributive position, particularly when referring to the order of birth of members of a family, the irregular forms *elder* ~ *eldest* are normally substituted (especially in BrE):

My *elder/older* sister is an artist.

His *eldest/oldest* son is still at school.

However, *elder* is not a true comparative in that it cannot be followed by *than*:

My sister is three years { *older* / **elder* } than me.

[b] *Well* ['in good health'] and *ill* ['in bad health'] <esp BrE> are inflected like *good* and *bad*, respectively, for the comparative: *He feels better/worse*. *He is better* can mean either (a) 'He is well again' or (b) 'He is less ill'.

Regular forms of comparison

7.42 With adjectives taking the regular inflections, certain changes in spelling or pronunciation may be introduced in the base of the adjective when the suffixes are added.

(a) A single consonant at the end of the base is doubled before *-er* and *-est* when the preceding vowel is stressed and spelled with a single letter (cf the spelling of verb forms, 3.6):

big ~ *bigger* ~ *biggest*

But contrast:

neat ~ *neater* ~ *neatest*
thick ~ *thicker* ~ *thickest*

(b) In bases ending in a consonant followed by *-y*, *y* changes to *-i* before *-er* and *-est*:

angry ~ *angrier* ~ *angriest*

(c) If the base ends in a mute (unpronounced) *-e*, this *e* is dropped before the inflection:

pure ~ *purier* ~ *purest*

The same applies if the base ends in *-ee*:

free ~ *freer* ~ *freest* / *frist* /

(d) Syllabic /l/, as in *simple*, ceases to be syllabic when inflections are added.

(e) Even for speakers who do not pronounce final *r*, the *r* is pronounced before the inflection, as in *poorer*.

NOTE There is a variant spelling in:

cruel { ~ *crueller* ~ *cruellest*
 ~ *crueler* ~ *crueltest* <esp AmE>

Choice between inflectional and periphrastic comparison

(a) Monosyllabic adjectives normally form their comparison by inflection:

low ~ *lower* ~ *lowest*

(b) Many disyllabic adjectives can also take inflections, though they have the alternative of the periphrastic forms:

Her children are { *politer/more polite*.
 (the) *politest* / (the) *most polite*.

Disyllabic adjectives that can most readily take inflected forms are those ending in an unstressed vowel, syllabic /l/, or *r*, eg:

-y: early, easy, funny, happy, noisy, wealthy, pretty

-ow: mellow, narrow, shallow

-le: able, feeble, gentle, noble, simple

(c) Trisyllabic or longer adjectives can only take periphrastic forms:

beautiful

~ *more beautiful* [BUT NOT: **beautifuler*]

~ *the most beautiful* [BUT NOT: **beautifullest*]

Adjectives with the negative *un*-prefix, such as *unhappy* and *untidy*, are exceptions:

~ *unhappier* ~ *unhappiest* ~ *untidier* ~ *untidiest*