

LATIN GRAMMAR

Wheelock 26: Comparison of Adjs; Abl of Comparison

1. The Three Degrees of Adjectives

1.1. When we think about comparing nouns on the basis of adjectival characteristics, there are three terms we need to understand that relate to the form of the adjective:

Positive Degree (simple noun with adj.)	the happy man	vir <i>beātus</i>
Comparative Degree (noun compared to 1 entity)	the happier man	vir <i>beātior</i>
Superlative Degree (noun compared to 2+ entities)	the happiest man	vir <i>beātissimus</i>

1.2. How to Form Latin Comparatives and Superlatives

1.2.1. **Positive:** This is always the lexical form of the adj as you learn it from the vocab list or lexicon.

1.2.2. **Comparative:** BASE of the positive adj. + **-iōr** (m/f), **-iūs** (n) ; **-iōris** gen.

1.2.3. **Superlative:** BASE of the positive adj. + **-issimūs**, **-a**, **-um**

Point of clarification: for 2-1-2 adjectives, the base/stem technically have a vowel at the end (o/u for 2nd decl, a for 1st decl); these vowels are dropped before adding the comp/sup morphemes. Here are a few exx:

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
longus, -a, -um (<i>long</i>)	longiōr, -iūs (<i>longer</i>)	longiōssimūs, -a, -um (<i>longest</i>)
fortis, -e, <i>gen.</i> fortis (<i>brave</i>)	fortiōr, -iūs (<i>braver</i>)	fortiōssimūs, -a, -um (<i>bravest</i>)
potēns, <i>gen.</i> potentis (<i>powerful</i>)	potentiōr, -iūs (<i>more powerful</i>)	potentiōssimūs, -a, -um (<i>most powerful</i>)

1.2.4. Alternate formation: Just as in English we mostly use **-er/-est** but sometimes use **more/most**, so also in Latin some adjectives use **magis** (*more*) and **maximē** (*most*) + positive adj form (like *idōneus*, -a, -us, *suitable*): **magis idōneus** (*more suitable*) and **maximē idōneus** (*most suitable*).

1.3. The Declension Patterns of Comparative and Superlative Adjs

The comparatives follow a 3-3 adj. pattern (m/f are 3rd decl and identical to each other, n is 3rd decl); however, they are NOT i-stem in their pattern. Below I've given you the positive degree i-stem adj. **fortis, -e, *gen.* fortis** (*brave*), which IS i-stem, as a point of comparison with the comparative non-i-stem adj. **fortiōr, -iūs** (*braver*). The superlatives follow standard 2-1-2 declension patterns like *magnus, -a, -um*.

POSITIVE ADJ		COMPARATIVE ADJ	
2-TERM I-STEM ADJ		2-TERM NON-I-STEM ADJ	
<i>BRAVE</i>		<i>BRAVER</i>	
	3	3	3
SING.	M/F	N	M/F
NOM	fortis	forte	fortior
GEN	fortis	fortis	fortiōris
DAT	fortī	fortī	fortiōrī
ACC	fortem	forte	fortiōrem
ABL	fortī	fortī	fortiōre
PL.			
NOM	fortēs	fortia	fortiōrēs
GEN	fortium	fortium	fortiōrum
DAT	fortibus	fortibus	fortiōribus
ACC	fortēs (-īs)	fortia	fortiōrēs
ABL	fortibus	fortibus	fortiōribus

2. Usage and Translation

2.1. Translation:

Generally, translate Latin comparative and superlative adjectives with *-er/-est* or with *more/most* if appropriate (typically, adjs of 3 or more syllables use the latter): *nice/nicer, lovely/lovelier*, but *beautiful/more beautiful*.

2.2. Other Comparative Usage:

- Sense of ‘rather’, having a quality to a higher degree than normal: *lūx clārior a rather/quite bright light.*
- Sense of having too much of a quality: *Vīta eius erat brevior, His life was too short.*

2.3. Other Superlative Usage:

- Sense of having a quality to an exceptionally high degree (beyond the usual or ideal): *Vīta eius erat brevissima, His life was very short.*

3. *Quam* with Comparatives and Superlatives

3.1. *Quam* with Comparatives:

When the conjunction *quam* follows the comparative adj., translate *quam* as ‘than’; the case of the phrases being compared (before and after *quam*) will have the same case. Exx:

Normal clause	Hī librī sunt clāriōrēs quam illī.	These books are more famous than those.
Indirect Speech (w/ Inf)	Dīcit hōs librōs esse clāriōrēs quam illōs.	He says that these books are more famous than those.

3.2. *Quam* with Superlatives:

When **quam** precedes the superlative adj., it is not a conjunction but an adverb and indicates that the noun has the quality to the highest possible degree. Ex:

Amīcus meus erat vir quam iūcundissimus. My friend was the pleasantest man possible or as pleasant as can be.

4. Ablative of Comparison

If the first noun being compared is Nom/Acc case, then **quam** can be omitted, and the second noun being compared will be in Ablative case. You will still translate the comparative expression as “__er/more __ than.” Exx:

Cōnsilia tua sunt clāriōra lūce.	Your plans are clearer than light. (= Cōnsilia tua sunt clāriōra quam lūx.)
Quis in Italiā erat clārior Cicerōne?	Who in Italy was more famous than Cicero?
Paucōs fēlīciōres patre tuō vīdī.	I have seen few men happier than your father.