

Extension exercises

Chapter 6: Comparatives and superlatives

How learners use English

Read the following very quickly and decide which of the three words (correct; dubious; incorrect) best describes your immediate reaction to the underlined part of the sentence. Try not to look back at your answers to previous items as you go through it.

(i) He's the <i>more important</i> person of all.	Correct	Dubious	Incorrect
(ii) He runs <i>quicker</i> than me.	Correct	Dubious	Incorrect
(iii) He runs <i>faster</i> than I.	Correct	Dubious	Incorrect
(iv) He's <i>more old</i> than me.	Correct	Dubious	Incorrect
(v) He's <i>pleasanter</i> than me.	Correct	Dubious	Incorrect
(vi) He runs <i>faster</i> than me.	Correct	Dubious	Incorrect
(vii) He's <i>more pleasant</i> than me.	Correct	Dubious	Incorrect
(viii) He's <i>older</i> than me.	Correct	Dubious	Incorrect
(ix) He's the <i>more important</i> person.	Correct	Dubious	Incorrect
(x) He runs <i>faster</i> than <i>me</i> .	Correct	Dubious	Incorrect
(xi) He's the <i>most important</i> person.	Correct	Dubious	Incorrect
(xii) She's the <i>most quick</i> off the mark.	Correct	Dubious	Incorrect
(xiii) She's the most important person <i>of</i> the team.	Correct	Dubious	Incorrect

- 1 Study your responses to this questionnaire, and try to give reasons for any sentences that you have classified as dubious or incorrect.
- 2 Ask two or three very competent users of English to complete the same questionnaire or one that you devise to focus on points of particular interest to you. Compare their responses with your own and with each others. Is there any disagreement? How can you account for this?

Exploring English

Either:

- ask two or three very competent speakers of English briefly to compare two or more objects, people, institutions or ideas. Record them doing so and subsequently transcribe any relevant sections of the recordings. Do not tell them the reason for this experiment.

Or:

- find a written text which is making a comparison (for example, comparing two or more products in terms of value to the consumer, comparing two recordings of the same piece of music, comparing two towns, comparing a place or life in a place before and after significant changes).

- 1 How much use do they make of comparative and superlative forms?
- 2 What proportion of comparative forms are followed by *than* . . . ?
- 3 What proportion of superlative forms are followed by *in* . . . or by a relative clause?
- 4 Do they make any use of 'non-standard' expressions (for example, *more bigger*, *more big*)?
- 5 How clearly do they pronounce the sounds which are normally 'weak' (for example, *er*; *than*) or are often left out (for example, the final /t/ in *est*).

Course materials

Study two coursebooks, if possible from the same series.

- 1 At what levels (for example, elementary, upper intermediate) is attention paid explicitly to different formal aspects of comparative and superlative forms of quantifiers, adjectives and adverbs (such as the use of *er* and *est* as opposed to *more* and *most*)?
- 2 How accurate and comprehensive is this information?
- 3 How much attention is paid to the meanings of these forms?
- 4 How accurate and comprehensive is this information?
- 5 How much attention is paid to relevant aspects of spelling? At what levels?
- 6 How much attention is paid to relevant aspects of pronunciation? At what levels?
- 7 How much attention is paid to ways of intensifying and qualifying these expressions? At what levels?
- 8 How much opportunity is provided for looking at how these forms are used in authentic texts or transcriptions of spoken English?
- 9 How much opportunity is provided for practice of these forms? How controlled is this practice? How natural is it?