

German Comparative and Superlative — größer, am größten

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German makes comparisons more regularly than English does. Where English switches between *bigger* and *more interesting* depending on the length of the word, German simply adds an ending to everything — even to long adjectives. *interessanter*, not *mehr interessant*.

The three forms

FORM	HOW	EXAMPLE
Positiv	<i>the plain adjective</i>	klein
Komparativ	+ -er	kleiner
Superlativ	am + -sten	am kleinsten

Mein Zimmer ist **kleiner** als deins.

Von allen Zimmern ist dieses **am kleinsten**.

The comparison word is **als**, not *wie*. *wie* is for things that are equal: *so groß wie* means *as big as*, while *größer als* means *bigger than*. Mixing them up is one of the most common errors at A2.

The umlaut group

A set of common one-syllable adjectives add an umlaut as well as the ending. There is no way to predict which ones — but the list is short and the words are frequent, so exposure handles most of it.

ADJECTIVE	KOMPARATIV	SUPERLATIV	MEANING
alt	älter	am ältesten	old
jung	jünger	am jüngsten	young
lang	länger	am längsten	long
kurz	kürzer	am kürzesten	short
warm	wärmer	am wärmsten	warm
kalt	kälter	am kältesten	cold
stark	stärker	am stärksten	strong
groß	größer	am größten	big

Also in this group: *arm, dumm, hart, klug, krank, scharf, schwach, schwarz, gesund*.

Note that the umlaut only appears in the comparative and superlative. The plain adjective keeps its original vowel: **alt**, not *ält*.

The five irregulars

These change more than their ending, and they are among the most-used words in the language — worth learning as a single block on day one.

ADJECTIVE	KOMPARATIV	SUPERLATIV	MEANING
gut	besser	am besten	good
viel	mehr	am meisten	much / many
gern	lieber	am liebsten	gladly
hoch	höher	am höchsten	high
nah	näher	am nächsten	near

hoch loses its *c* before an ending — **höher**, never *hocher* — and *groß* takes **am größten** rather than the expected *am größesten*.

gern is worth special attention because it works with verbs rather than nouns: *Ich trinke **gern** Kaffee* → *Ich trinke **lieber** Tee* → *Am **liebsten** trinke ich Wasser*. That progression is how you express preference in everyday German.

When -esten replaces -sten

The superlative usually adds **-sten**. But if the adjective ends in **-d, -t, -s, -ß, -z, -x** or **-sch**, an extra *e* slips in to make the word pronounceable. Adjectives ending in a vowel do the same: *neu* → *am neuesten*.

laut → *am laut**esten*** · *kalt* → *am käl**t**est**en*** · *interessant* → *am interessant**esten*** · *heiß* → *am heiß**esten***

Say *am laut**sten*** out loud and the reason becomes obvious.

The one exception: *groß* ends in *ß* but takes *am größ**t**en*, not *am größ**est**en*. It is the only common adjective that breaks this rule, so learn it as a one-off.

Adjectives that adjust their stem

ADJECTIVE	KOMPARATIV	NOTE
teuer	<i>teurer</i>	the -er loses its e
dunkel	<i>dunkler</i>	the -el loses its e
leise	<i>leiser</i>	already ends in -e, so only -r is added
sauber	<i>sauberer</i>	keeps its e — only <i>teuer</i> drops it

Comparatives before a noun still take endings

A comparative used in front of a noun declines like any other adjective, so it carries two endings at once — the comparative *-er* and then the case ending.

*ein größ**er**es Zimmer* · *mit dem äl**ter**en Bruder* · *die bess**er**e Lösung*

The superlative behaves the same way and drops the *am*: *das größ**t**e Zimmer*, *der best**e** Film*.

When to learn what

LEVEL	FOCUS
A1	<i>gut</i> → <i>besser</i> , <i>viel</i> → <i>mehr</i> , <i>gern</i> → <i>lieber</i> as vocabulary
A2	<i>the -er and am ...-sten pattern as a system, the umlaut group</i>
B1	<i>the remaining irregulars, the -esten rule, comparatives before nouns</i>
B2	<i>longer adjectives and comparative forms in formal writing</i>