Adverbs: degrees of comparison

Adverbs are often used to make the meaning of a verb or other adverb stronger or weaker. This is known as ‘degrees of comparison’.

Understanding degrees of comparison

There are three degrees of comparison:

- **The positive degree** is the simple form of the adverb: eg slowly, early (‘He walked slowly.’).
- **The comparative degree** is used to compare two actions: eg slower, more slowly, earlier (‘Sarah walked more slowly than Ben.’).
- **The superlative degree** is used to compare three or more: eg slowest, earliest (‘We all take our time, but I walk the slowest of all.’).

Making degrees of comparison

Adverbs of one syllable usually form the comparative by adding -er and form the superlative by adding -est.

hard (positive) - harder (comparative) - hardest (superlative)

Adverbs of two syllables or more generally form the comparative by adding ‘more’ and the superlative by adding ‘most’.

quickly (positive) - more quickly (comparative) - most quickly (superlative)

Watch out! There are exceptions:

- **badly**: worse (comparative) - worst (superlative).
- **well**: better (comparative) - best (superlative).
- **far**: farther (comparative) - farthest (superlative).