

Comparative and superlative

— STEIGERUNG DER ADJEKTIVE

The Steigerung (comparison of adjectives) is how German compares qualities: schön, schöner, am schönsten.

“größer wie du” — a very common mistake. English has one word for comparing (“than”) and another for equality (“as”), and German splits the job the same way with **als** and **wie**, but people mix them up all the time.

CONTENTS

- 01 Three steps 02 Two forms of the superlative 03 When -esten, when Umlaut
- 04 Five irregulars — these you memorise 05 als or wie — one difference 06 Traps
- 07 Test yourself

01 00:10

Three steps

 **SHORTCUT** No matter how long the word is, the ending is the same: **-er** and **am -sten**. German has **no** “more / most” split like English (*beautiful, more beautiful* vs. *big, bigger*).

English adds “more” and “most” in front of long adjectives; German always adds an ending to the **end** of the adjective. The three steps are called **Positiv • Komparativ • Superlativ**.

POSITIV	KOMPARATIV ...ER	SUPERLATIV THE ...EST	MEANING
schnell	schneller	am schnellsten	fast
klein	kleiner	am kleinsten	small
interessant	interessanter	am interessantesten	interesting

The third row matters: **interessant** is a long word, but it still takes **-er**. This is where English speakers slip most often — there is **no such thing** as **mehr interessant** (“more interesting”).

✓ **Der Zug ist **schneller** als das Auto.**

The train is faster than the car.

✗ **Der Zug ist **mehr schnell**.**

English leaking in — this doesn’t exist

Two forms of the superlative

The “-est / most” idea is built in two ways, and **its position in the sentence decides which one you need**.

WHERE	FORM	EXAMPLE
After the verb , standing alone	am ...-sten	Dieser Zug ist am schnellsten . This train is the fastest .
Before a noun , as an adjective	der/die/das ...-ste	Das ist der schnellste Zug . That is the fastest train .

At A1 the **am ...-sten** form is enough — the second one needs adjective endings, which is a separate topic. Quick rule: **before a noun** use the article form, **standing alone** use the **am** form.

When -esten, when Umlaut

- If the adjective ends in **-d · -t · -s · -ß · -z · -sch**, an **-e-** slips into the superlative: **alt → am ältesten**, **heiß → am heißesten**.
- Most **one-syllable** adjectives take an Umlaut on **a · o · u**: **alt → älter · groß → größer · jung → jünger · lang → länger · kalt → kälter · warm → wärmer**.
- The Umlaut rule does **not** work for **longer** adjectives: **langsam → langsamer** (not **längsamer**).

- ① The Umlaut list is short and made up of everyday words — don’t try to cram it, it sticks as you use it. If you’re not sure, say it without the Umlaut: you’ll still be understood, it will just sound a bit foreign.

ADVERTISEMENT

728 × 90

Five irregulars — these you memorise

POSITIV	KOMPARATIV	SUPERLATIV	MEANING
gut	besser	am besten	good
viel	mehr	am meisten	much - a lot
gern	lieber	am liebsten	gladly - like to
hoch	höher	am höchsten	high
nah	näher	am nächsten	near - close

The **gern** row is the most useful in daily life: **Ich trinke gern Tee, aber lieber Kaffee — am liebsten Wasser.**
 “I like tea, but I prefer coffee — and most of all I like water.”

als or wie — one difference

In English it is easy: “taller *than*” but “as tall *as*”. German works the same way, but with two different words, and that is why people mix them up. The split is sharp: **equal means wie, different means als.**

SITUATION	CONJUNCTION	EXAMPLE
Equal — same degree	so ... wie	Elif ist so groß wie Ali . Elif is as tall as Ali .
Different — comparison	...-er als	Elif ist größer als Ali . Elif is taller than Ali .

Rule to memorise: **if there is a Komparativ, use als; if not, use wie.** The moment you see the **-er** ending, **als** follows. In casual speech you may hear **größer wie** — it is common but **wrong**, and it is not accepted in an exam.

- ✓ **Der Kaffee ist so heiß wie der Tee.**

The coffee is as hot as the tea.

- ✓ **Der Kaffee ist heißer als der Tee.**

The coffee is hotter than the tea.

Traps



TRAP 01

mehr schön · am meisten schön

The English pattern *more beautiful* does **not carry over** into German. Even a long adjective takes an ending.

✗ Das Bild ist **mehr schön**.

no such structure

✓ Das Bild ist **schöner**.

The picture is more beautiful.



TRAP 02

Forgetting am

A bare superlative doesn't stand on its own; it wants **am** in front of it. **Das ist schnellsten** is only half a sentence.

✓ Dieser Zug ist **am schnellsten**.

This train is the fastest.



TRAP 03

Saying größer wie

A structure you hear a lot but which is wrong. When there is a comparison, use **als**: **größer als**. **wie** is only used in the **so ... wie** pattern, that is, for **equality**.



TRAP 04

Thinking gut → guter

gut is irregular: **besser · am besten**. **guter** is not a Komparativ, it is an **adjective with an ending** (ein guter Mann) — two different things.

Build the sentence yourself

Tap the words and put them in order. This is the hardest part of German — and there are no options to pick from, **you** build it.

TAP THE WORDS

TAP THE WORDS

TAP THE WORDS

Test yourself

Tap an answer — we will look at why together.

+7

Take the full test

13 questions · timed · rule breakdown at the end

↗

ADVERTISEMENT



728 × 250