

French Superlatives

Superlatives in French are essential for expressing the highest or lowest degree of a quality. Whether you are comparing adjectives, adverbs, verbs, or nouns, understanding the rules and exceptions will considerably help you sound more natural.

We take a closer look into the world of superlatives in French, and explore various structures and uses, providing clear examples and highlighting key exceptions and specific rules.

The basics

Let's start with the basics:

le plus

the most

le moins

the least

With adjectives

To say that something is “the most” something, you need the definite article (**le, la** or **les**), followed by the word **plus** and the adjective. For example:

le plus cher *the most expensive (masculine)*

la plus chère *the most expensive (feminine)*

les plus chers / chères *the most expensive (plural, masculine / feminine)*

The structure is very similar to say “**the least**” something. We use **le, la** or **les**, followed by **moins** and the adjective.

le moins cher *the least expensive (masculine)*

la moins chère *the least expensive (feminine)*

les moins chers / chères *the least expensive (plural, masculine / feminine)*

Further examples:

le plus beau / le plus sérieux *the most handsome / the most serious (m)*

la plus belle / la plus sérieuse *the most beautiful / the most serious (f)*

les plus beaux / les plus sérieux *the most handsome / the most serious (plural, m)*

les plus belles / les plus sérieuses *the most beautiful / the most serious (plural, f)*

When it comes to the pronunciation of **plus** and **moins**, the final **-s** is normally kept silent, although you may occasionally find people from specific regions who choose to pronounce the final **-s**. However, if the adjective starts with a vowel, you then have to make a **z** sound liaison between **plus / moins** and the adjective.

With 'bon' & 'mauvais'

The superlative forms of the adjectives **bon / bonne** (“good”) and **mauvais / mauvaise** (“bad”) are irregular.

le meilleur / la meilleure / les meilleurs / les meilleures

the best (m singular / f singular / m plural / f plural)

le pire / la pire / les pires

the worst (m singular / f singular / m & f plural)

With 'petit'

Petit / petite is an interesting word. It means “small” and it can be in the sense of size, but also in the sense of significance. And the way to form the superlative of **petit** is different depending on its meaning.

Size or measurement:

le / la / les plus petit(e/s) *the smallest, the shortest*

Value or importance:

le moindre problème / souci *the slightest problem / worry*

As you can see with the examples, **le plus petit, la plus petite, les plus petits** and **les plus petites** are the correct ways to translate “the smallest” or “the shortest” when referring to size or measurement. When **petit** is about importance / significance, then you have to use **le moindre, la moindre, les moindres**.

With adverbs

It is also possible to use superlatives in French with **adverbs**. The structure is very similar and all you need is **le** followed by **plus** or **moins**.

le plus / moins sérieusement *the most / least seriously*

le plus rapidement / vite *the fastest, the quickest*

le plus tôt / tard *the earliest / latest*

Remember, adverbs are not gendered. This means that even if the subject is feminine, there is no agreement. For example:

C'est elle qui court le plus rapidement. *It is she who runs the fastest.*

With 'bien' & 'mal'

We saw earlier that “good” and “bad” (**bon** and **mauvais**) follow a different rule than other adjectives when using superlatives in French. Similarly, the adverb **bien** (“well”) also follows a different rule.

C'est moi qui chante le mieux. *I'm the one who sings best.*

C'est elle qui chante le plus mal. *She is the one who sings the worst.*

As you can see from the examples, the superlative of **bien** is **le mieux**. The superlative of **mal** is **le plus mal**. Again, there is no feminine or plural version.

With verbs

Superlatives in French with **verbs** follow the same structure. Consider these examples:

parler le plus *to speak the most*
travailler le moins *to work the least*

Interestingly, the final **–s** in **plus** is normally pronounced. Regarding **moins**, the final **–s** is usually not pronounced. However, it is pronounced in some regions of France, so don't be alarmed if you hear different pronunciations!

With nouns

Having looked at adjectives, adverbs and verbs, let's now look at examples of superlatives in French with nouns:

le jour où il y a le plus / le moins de monde *the day when there are the most / least people*
le jour où il y a le plus de soleil *the day with the most sun*

Remember, when **de** is followed by a noun starting with a vowel, it becomes **d'**.

le plus d'énergie / d'argent *the most energy / money*
le moins d'énergie / d'argent *the least energy / money*

Other things to consider

If the superlative is placed **after** the noun, the article needs to be repeated, which is quite different from English. **Regardons ces exemples :**

le plus beau village de France *the most beautiful village in France*
le village le plus beau de France *the village that is the most beautiful in France*
la plus belle ville de France *the most beautiful city in France*
la ville la plus belle de France *the city that is the most beautiful in France*
la plus chère voiture électrique *the most expensive electric car*
la voiture électrique la plus chère *the electric car that is the most expensive*

<p>le/la/les plus (adjective) = the most (adjective)</p>	<p>le plus beau la plus belle les plus beaux les plus belles</p>
<p>le/la/les moins (adjective) = the least (adjective)</p>	<p>le moins gentil la moins gentille les moins gentils les moins gentilles</p>
<p>le plus de (noun) = the most (noun)</p>	<p>le plus d'argent</p>
<p>le moins de (noun) = the least (noun)</p>	<p>le moins d'argent</p>

Test your knowledge

Now, let's put your newfound knowledge to the test! Here are three sentences in English; your challenge is to translate them into French. Remember to try to identify whether the superlatives involve an adjective, a verb, an adverb or a noun! You can find the answers at the bottom of the page. Cover the answers before you translate the three sentences and then check them to see if you are correct.

1. *It's Mary who is the tallest.*
2. *It's John who has the most energy.*
3. *She sings the best and she is the best singer.*

Understanding superlatives in French, including their structure and usage with different parts of speech, is crucial for expressing extremes and comparisons effectively. Practising these superlatives in various contexts will help you become more fluent and accurate in your French communication. Additionally, knowing the difference between **mieux** vs. **meilleur** is key to mastering comparatives and superlatives in French.

Here are the answers to the translation challenge:

1. C'est Mary qui est la plus grande.
2. C'est John qui a le plus d'énergie.
3. Elle chante le mieux et elle est la meilleure chanteuse.