

# 61. Using superlatives

## 1 Definition

The **superlative** is the form of an adjective or adverb that expresses the highest or a very high degree of the quality being denoted. For example in the sentence *She is the brightest pupil in the class*, the word *brightest* is a superlative adjective; and in the sentence *Of all the students, she performed best*, the word *best* is a superlative adverb.

## 2 Formation

### 2.1 Adjectives

Superlative adjectives are formed using the definite article *le, la, les* with *plus* or *moins*.

C'est lui **le plus fort** de la classe

*He's the strongest in the class*

Note the irregular forms:

**standard form**

bon - *good*

mauvais - *bad*

⇒

**superlative**

le meilleur - *(the) best*

⇒

le plus mauvais / le pire - *(the) worst*

### 2.2 Adverbs

Superlative adverbs are formed using the definite article *le* with *plus* or *moins*:

C'est Marie qui a couru **le plus vite**

*It was Marie who ran fastest*

Note that the *le* is invariable, i.e. you do not write \**C'est Marie qui a couru la plus vite*.

Note also the irregular adverbial forms:

**standard form**

bien - *well*

beaucoup - *many / a lot*

peu - *little*

⇒

⇒

⇒

**superlative**

le mieux - *(the) best*

le plus - *(the) most*

le moins - *(the) least*

## 3 Other points

### 3.1 Using superlative adjectives with nouns

When applied to adjectives used **before** the noun, the superlative is quite straightforward:

C'est **le plus grand** fabricant de voitures du monde

*It is the largest car producer in the world*

When the adjective being used normally comes **after** the noun, the definite article must be used with the superlative adjective as well as the noun:

C'est **le** pays **le plus riche** du monde

*It's the richest country in the world*

The definite article must be used even if the noun is qualified by a possessive:

**Sa** qualité **la plus impressionnante** résidait dans sa capacité de garder son sang-froid  
*His / her most impressive quality was his / her ability to stay calm*

Of course, the adjective and its article must agree with the noun:

C'est de loin **la** fille **la plus intelligente** de la classe  
*She's easily the brightest girl in the class*

### 3.2 Subjunctive after superlative adjectives

In a relative clause following a superlative adjective, the verb must be in the subjunctive:

C'est la situation la plus grave que j'**aie** jamais connue  
*It's the most serious situation I've ever seen*