

Adjectives and Degrees of Comparison

Grammar reference and quiz

PART A · GRAMMAR REFERENCE

1. Negative prefixes: forming opposite adjectives

Prefix	When we use it	Examples in geology and water contexts
un-	before most adjectives	unstable, unexpected, unsafe, unpredictable — <i>unstable ground after an earthquake</i>
in-	before many adjectives	invisible, inactive, inconsistent — <i>invisible particles; an inactive volcano</i>
im-	before p, b, m	impure, impermeable, impossible — <i>impure river water; impermeable rock</i>
il-	before l	illogical, illegal — <i>an illogical explanation of the results</i>
ir-	before r	irregular, irreversible, irresponsible — <i>an irregular rock surface; irreversible pollution</i>
dis-	with some adjectives	discontinuous, disconnected, dissimilar — <i>discontinuous permafrost; disconnected pores in rock</i>

Remember: each adjective takes only **one** negative prefix, so learn them together: ~~Xunpure~~ ✓ **impure** ~~Xunlogical~~ ✓ **illogical** ~~Xunregular~~ ✓ **irregular** ~~Xunvisible~~ ✓ **invisible** ~~Xunexpected~~ ✓ **unexpected**. The prefix **non-** is used with some words (*non-toxic, non-renewable*), but not with these adjectives.

2. Degrees of comparison: how to form them

Type of adjective	Comparative (two things)	Superlative (three or more)
Short: 1 syllable — deep, cold, high, pure, hot	adj + -er (+ than): deeper, purer, hotter (hot → hotter)	the + adj + -est : the deepest, the purest, the hottest
Ending in -y — rainy, muddy, salty	y → i + -er : rainier, muddier, saltier	the + y → i + -est : the rainiest, the muddiest
Long: 2+ syllables — accurate, valuable, vulnerable, successful, effective, destructive, devastating, unpredictable	more + adj (+ than): more accurate, more valuable	the most + adj: the most effective, the most destructive
Irregular	good → better ; bad → worse ; far → farther / further ; little → less	the best ; the worst ; the farthest / furthest ; the least

3. Key patterns

Pattern	Form	Example
① Equality	as + adj + as	<i>This rock sample is as hard as the first one.</i>
② Inequality	not as / not so + adj + as	<i>Sandstone is not as hard as granite.</i>
③ Comparative	adj-er / more + adj + than	<i>The core is hotter than the mantle. This method is more accurate than the old one.</i>
④ Superlative	the + adj-est / the most + adj	<i>The Mariana Trench is the deepest place in the ocean.</i>
⑤ One of the ...	one of the + superlative + plural noun	<i>It was one of the most destructive tsunamis in history.</i>
⑥ Lower degree	less + adj (+ than) / the least + adj	<i>Underwater volcanoes are less visible than those on land. Of sand, gravel and clay, clay is the least permeable.</i>
⑦ Intensified	much / far / a lot + comparative (stronger); slightly / a bit / a little + comparative (weaker)	<i>Satellite images are far more accurate than old maps. The valley is slightly colder than the plain.</i>

4. Watch out: typical mistakes

Mistake	Correct	Why?
Xmore hotter	✓hotter	short adjective: -er only
Xaccurater; destructivest	✓more accurate; the most destructive	long adjective: more / the most
Xmuch hot than	✓much hotter than	much goes with a comparative
Xas devastating than; not as low than	✓as devastating as; not as low as	as ... as never takes than
Xfewer clean; fewer contaminated	✓less clean; less contaminated	less + adjective (fewer + plural noun)
Xone of the most effective tool	✓one of the most effective tools	one of the + plural noun
Xvery less polluted	✓much less polluted	intensify comparatives with much / far, not very

PART B · PRACTICE

TASK 1 Practise the forms

A. Complete the table with the comparative and superlative forms. Write the superlative with the (the deepest). See Part A, section 2.

Adjective	Comparative	Superlative (with the)
deep		
hot		
wet		
salty		
dangerous		
valuable		
good		
bad		
little		

B. Write the opposite of each adjective. Use the correct negative prefix: un-, in-, im-, il-, ir- or dis-. See Part A, section 1.

1. permeable →

2. reversible →

3. active →

4. legal →

5. continuous →

6. safe →

7. possible →

8. predictable →

TASK 2 Quiz: choose the correct option

Read each sentence and choose the correct option (a, b, c or d). The section numbers in Part A will help you.

1. Volcanoes located underwater are often _____ visible than those on land.

- a) not as b) fewer c) the least d) less

2. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami was one of the _____ natural disasters in history.

- a) destructivest b) most destructive c) more destructive d) less destructive

3. The earthquake in Japan was _____ devastating _____ the one in Haiti.

- a) as / as b) not as / than c) not so / than d) as / than

4. The level of humidity in a rainforest is _____ low _____ in a desert.

- a) as / as b) not as / than c) not as / as d) as / than

5. After the earthquake, the ground was completely _____ (stable).

- a) instable b) unstable c) disstable d) nonstable

6. The scientist found the explanation _____ (logical).
a) unlogical b) dislogical c) mislogical d) illogical
7. Compared to surface water, groundwater is usually _____ contaminated.
a) the least b) fewer c) little d) less
8. In industrial regions, rainwater is often _____ clean than groundwater because it collects pollutants from the air.
a) less b) much c) the least d) fewer
9. The polluted river water was _____ (pure) and unsafe for drinking.
a) unpure b) dispure c) impure d) nonpure
10. The scientist called the result _____ (expected) because the experiment failed.
a) inexpected b) unexpected c) disexpected d) nonexpected
11. The core of the Earth is _____ than the mantle.
a) least hot b) hotter c) the hottest d) much hot
12. The tiny particles in the sample were _____ (visible) to the naked eye.
a) invisible b) disvisible c) invisible d) nonvisible
13. The surface of the rock looked _____ (regular) due to erosion.
a) irregular b) unregular c) disregular d) illregular
14. The new research method is _____ than the traditional one.
a) accurater b) more accurate c) the most accurate d) most accurate
15. This region is _____ vulnerable to earthquakes than the coastal zone.
a) most b) the more c) much d) more
16. Remote sensing is one of _____ effective tools for studying landforms.
a) more b) most c) the most d) much most
17. The plateau experiences sudden temperature changes, so its climate is _____ unpredictable than that of the valley.
a) less b) the least c) more d) most
18. This mineral deposit is _____ valuable than previously estimated.
a) much b) more c) most d) the most
19. Of all the experiments, this one was _____ successful in predicting volcanic eruptions.
a) more b) as c) the most d) much
20. Groundwater is usually _____ less polluted than surface water.
a) much b) more c) very d) the