

LA FORME SUPERLATIVE – THE SUPERLATIVE FORM

Goal: By the end of this lesson, you should be able to express the extreme or highest degree of a quality in French:

-le/la/les **plus...** (*the most... /adj. +est*)

-le/ la/ les **moins** (*the least...*)

The superlative form is used to show how who (or what) has a quality to the greatest or least degree. I am sure many of you already understand this concept of superlative in English, but just to make things clear, let me provide one example:

Car # 1 = 20,000 dollars.

Car # 2 = 30,000 dollars.

Car # 3 = 45,000 dollars.

We can therefore conclude that Car # 3 is the most expensive car, while Car # 1 is the least expensive one. But how do we obtain the superlative in French?

Most of the time, the superlative form is employed with adjectives (as in above example). However, it can also be used with verbs, adverbs and nouns, just like in the comparative form. In this lesson, I will choose to emphasize more the use of the superlative with adjectives.

Le Superlatif de Superiorité (with Adjectives)

Examples speak much stronger than words. I will therefore go straight to the point, and will provide several sentences in French expressing the Superlative of superiority along with their translations in English. Then I will give you the formula to use.

Important: Pay attention to the definite articles (le/la/les) preceding the word PLUS in superlative form in French. These definite articles are ALWAYS present.

Also, note that in these below examples, the superlative (underlined) can precede or follow the noun. I'll show both ways.

Renée est la plus belle fille de la classe. (*Renée is the most beautiful girl in the class*)

Renée est la fille la plus belle de la classe. (**Here the superlative follows the noun fille**)

Julien est le plus jeune garçon de la famille. (*Julien is the youngest boy in the family*).

Julien est le garçon le plus jeune de la famille. (**Here the superlative follows the noun garçon**)

Ils ne sont pas les plus méchantes personnes. (*They are not the meanest people*).

Ils ne sont pas les personnes les plus méchantes. (**Here the superlative follows the noun personnes**)

Je ne suis pas la plus riche personne de la terre. (*I am not the richest person on the Earth*).

Je ne suis pas la personne la plus riche de la terre. (**Here the superlative follows the noun personne**).

The most important elements to remember:

- a) The definite articles **LE – LA – LES** → *the*
- b) The word **PLUS** → *most*, or the suffix *...est*
- c) The adjective itself

Formula = Subject + Verb être + definite article (le/la/les) + Plus + Adjective + noun + rest of sentence. (**Here the superlative [underlined] precedes noun**)

Formula = Subject + verb être + article (le/la/les) + noun + article (le/la/les) + plus + adjective + rest of sentence. (**Here the superlative [underlined] follows noun**)

Knowing how to conjugate the verb **ÊTRE** (to be) is also very important since the superlative with adjectives employs this verb almost always.

The definite article must agree in number and gender with the noun following the adjective.

In the example Renée est la plus belle fille de la classe (*Renée is the most beautiful girl in the class*), the article la agrees with the noun fille that follows the adjective belle. Fille is feminine-singular, so is the definite article la. If there is no noun, for example, in the sentence **Elle est la plus jeune** (She is the youngest), then the article should agree with the subject (elle).

Le Superlatif d'Infériorité (with Adjectives)

If you have understood very well how to make the superlative of superiority in French, understanding the superlative of inferiority will be just as easy.

Just take the formula for the superlative of superiority, and replace the PLUS by MOINS.

We will transform superiority superlatives into inferiority superlatives. Let's take the exact same sentences provided above at the beginning.

Renée est la fille la plus belle de la classe → Renée est la fille la moins belle de la classe (*Renée is the least beautiful girl in the classroom. Hmmm, not a nice thing to say, but this is just an example* 😊)

Ils ne sont pas les personnes les plus méchantes. → Ils ne sont pas les personnes les moins méchantes. (*They are not the least mean people*).

Julien est le garçon le plus jeune de la famille. → Julien est le garçon le moins jeune de la famille. (*Julien is the least young boy in the family*).

Je ne suis pas la personne la plus riche de la terre. Je ne suis pas la personne la moins riche de la terre. (*I am not the least rich person of the Earth.*)

Formula = Subject + verb être + article (le/la/les) + noun + article (le/la/les) + moins + adjective + rest of sentence. (**Here the superlative [underlined] follows noun**)

Formula = Subject + Verb être + definite article (le/la/les) + moins + Adjective + noun + rest of sentence. (**Here the superlative [underlined] precedes noun**)

Exceptions:

The adjectives *Bon* (good), *Bien* (good, well), and *Mauvais* (bad) have an irregular superlative form. So it is incorrect to say ~~le plus bon~~, when you mean the best.

How to say THE BEST (adjective good) → Based on the formulas above, you may be tempted to say le plus bon (the best), which is wrong. Instead of saying *le plus bon*, the correct form is **le meilleur/la meilleure/les meilleures** (use **LE, LA, or LES** based on the noun or subject the adjective modifies).

Example: La meilleure boisson (*the best drink*) – Le meilleur joueur (*the best player*) – les meilleures équipes (*the best teams*)

How to say The BEST (with adverb *well*) → Use le/la/les mieux. Usually, mieux is used with verbs NOT adjectives as in previous examples.

For example: Il parle le mieux (*He speaks the best*) – Cette chemise me va /convient le mieux. (*This shirt fits/matches me (the) best*).

How to say THE WORST → **Mauvais (bad)** can have both a regular and irregular superlative form. You can say le plus mauvais, la plus mauvaise, les plus mauvais(es) when you mean the worst. And you can also say le pire, la pire, les pires.

Example: La plus mauvaise boisson/la pire boisson (the worst drink) - le plus mauvais joueur (the worst player) /Le pire joueur- les plus mauvaises équipes/les pires équipes (*the worst teams*)