Suffix -er and -est: Comparing Adjectives in Year 2 Writing

In Year 2, children learn to add -er and -est to adjectives to compare things. 'Tall' becomes 'taller' (comparing two things) and 'tallest' (comparing three or more). The tricky part is learning when to double the last letter (big, bigger, biggest), swap y for i (happy, happier, happiest), or drop a silent e (large, larger, largest). This guide explains what it is, why it matters, and how you can help your child practise at home in a relaxed, playful way.

What it is

"Comparing adjectives" means using words to show how things are different in size, colour, shape, feeling or other ways. When we compare, we use special word endings (called suffixes) to make new words. In Year 2, children learn to add -er and -est to adjectives to make these comparisons. For example, 'tall' stays as 'tall' for one thing, becomes 'taller' when comparing two things ("your brother is taller than you"), and 'tallest' when comparing three or more ("you are the tallest in the group"). This is a key part of the Year 2 English curriculum for word-formation, and it helps children write more interesting descriptions and express themselves more clearly.

What happens

Children learn three main patterns for adding -er and -est. Sometimes you just add the letters straight on (small, smaller, smallest). Sometimes you need to double the last letter first - 'big' becomes 'bigger' then 'biggest'. Sometimes you swap the letter 'y' for 'i' before adding the ending - 'happy' becomes 'happier' then 'happiest'. And sometimes you drop a silent 'e' before adding - 'large' becomes 'larger' then 'largest'. Teachers introduce these patterns gradually, often starting with the simplest words, so children build confidence before tackling trickier ones.

What it means for your child

Your child is learning to be a more flexible writer. As they move into writing descriptions and stories, they'll want to say 'the big dog' or 'the biggest dog' - and now they have the rule to do it. It also helps them spot and use these patterns when they read. This isn't about memorising rules - it's about noticing patterns and applying them. Some children will pick it up quickly; others need more time and practice. Both are completely normal in Year 2.

How you can help at home

Keep it playful. Point out comparisons in everyday life: "Your brother is tall, but Dad is taller!" or "That's a happy face - yours is even happier!" Play with words in conversations without making it feel like a lesson. If your child writes using comparisons, celebrate it rather than correcting every spelling. If they ask why 'big' becomes 'bigger', you could say: "We double the last letter to keep it sounding right." Short, simple explanations are best. Read picture books together where characters compare things - it helps children see comparisons in context.

Questions parents often ask

Does my child need to get these right first time? No. Year 2 is about learning and trying. Mistakes are how children learn the pattern. **What if my child forgets the rule?** That's fine - repetition over time builds automaticity. They'll get there. **Should I correct their writing?** Focus on whether you understood them. If it's a word-ending spelling error, you could gently show the right way without making a big thing of it. **Are there words that don't follow these patterns?** Yes - English is full of irregular words like 'good, better, best'. Children learn those as separate cases as they encounter them.

Sources

- National Curriculum in England: English Programmes of Study (Key Stage 1), Department for Education
- Key Stage 1: English, GOV.UK