

CONSCIOUSNES-RAISING TASK: DISCOVERING COMPARATIVE ADJECTIVE RULES

This week’s activity features a consciousness-raising (CR) task in which learners use example sentences containing the target form to discover general grammar rules about comparative adjectives.

Apart from focusing on grammatical forms, this CR task supplies two additional benefits. The teacher makes students aware of the two different form options and then invites them to solve a grammar “puzzle” by examining language examples containing the target feature. The challenge of discovery-based (inductive) rule formulation can be more motivating and interesting to students than when the teacher simply gives them a grammar rule and asks them to apply it in practice exercises. Additionally, since students complete the CR task in pairs, it not only provides explicit, inductive grammar instruction, but also serves as a communicative activity. For more information about CR tasks, be sure to check out Heather Benucci’s 2013 *Shaping the Way We Teach English* webinar [“Discovering Grammar with Consciousness-raising Tasks.”](#)

Note: This CR activity does not address every possible prescriptive rule associated with comparative adjective forms; instead it focuses on general guidelines. Specific topics like the spelling changes needed to preserve vowel quality in one-syllable consonant-vowel-consonant adjectives (e.g., *big* -> *bigger* not **biger*) must be addressed separately.

LEVEL

Lower Intermediate and above

LANGUAGE FOCUS

Grammar: comparative adjectives in superiority comparisons; the activity’s content can be modified for superlative adjectives in superiority comparisons (see the “Notes” section at the end of the activity for more details)

GOALS

During this activity, students will:

- Discover general rules for when to use “adjective + *-er/-r/-ier than*” versus “*more adjective than*” by examining sentences containing comparative adjectives in superiority comparisons.
- Discuss and compare the price and quality of two products or services based on information in print advertisements (Note: “ad” is a common shortened form of “advertisement”).
- Become aware of two common irregular comparative forms: *good* -> *better* and *bad* -> *worse*

MATERIALS

- Teacher:
 - Whiteboard, chalkboard, or large pieces of paper posted on the wall
 - Markers or chalk
 - Picture of a smart phone and an older basic phone (a “flip” mobile phone, a mobile phone with buttons); you can draw these items on the board if desired. Optional pictures are provided.
 - CR Task - Comparative Adjectives Worksheet- Answers (.pdf)
- Students:
 - Pencils or pens
 - CR Task - Comparative Adjectives Worksheet (.pdf)

PREPARATION

- Print out or prepare images of a smart phone and a basic phone.
- Copy or print out the CR Task - Comparative Adjectives Worksheet, ideally making enough copies for each student to have his/her own copy. To save paper, print two-sided worksheets; students working in pairs can share a copy.

PROCEDURES

1. Display the mobile phone pictures on the board (a new smart phone and an older, more basic feature phone). Label them “smart phone” and “basic phone.”
2. Ask students to provide adjectives to describe each phone (expected responses may include: *cool, new, modern, fancy, expensive, old, cheap*, etc.). List the adjectives on the board under each picture. Ensure that students provide a combination of one-syllable, two-syllable, two-syllable that end in -y, and three (or more)-syllable adjectives; use elicitation as needed to achieve this variety. For example, you might say, “How can we describe something that costs a lot of money?” to elicit *expensive*, and then ask, “Which of these phone is expensive?”
3. Ask students how they would compare the qualities of the two phones in a sentence. You might give examples, such as: *The smart phone is more modern than the basic phone.* (write the sentence on the board). Then say, “What if we want to talk about price? What word can we use to describe something that doesn’t cost much money? (trying to elicit “cheap”) So, we can say the *The basic phone is cheaper than the smart phone.*” (write the sentence on the board).
4. Prompt students to compare the two sentences on the board: “Hmm...we used *more modern* to make a comparison in the first sentence, but *cheaper* to compare the phones in the second sentence. These sentences have the same purpose, right? To compare? Maybe there is a rule that can help us know how to make these comparative adjectives. Let’s find out.” (Note: leave the sample sentences and adjective lists on the board; you will return to this information after the consciousness-raising activity).
5. Put students into pairs and ask student volunteers to pass out the CR Task - Comparative Adjectives worksheets.
6. Ask students if they have seen advertisements like the ones on the worksheet in newspapers, in magazines, or on the Internet for products like TVs, cell phones, etc. Ask follow up questions

like: “What do you do when you look at ads? Do you look at more than one item? What information do you look at?”

7. Explain the CR Task instructions:
 - Tell students they are going to work with their partners to examine advertisements in the worksheet (Part A). Explain that there are sentences below each set of ads that compare the two products. Explain that for each sentence in Part A, the pair must identify and write down the base form of the comparative adjective. Model the example in the first sentence.
 - Explain that in Part B, pairs will work together to put each base form and associated comparative form in the appropriate column based on the number of syllables in the base form. Model an example and remind students that they can use tapping or clapping when saying a word aloud to count the number of syllables it contains.
 - Tell students in Part C they must examine the sentences, underline the comparative adjectives, and then decide which three sentences use the comparative adjectives incorrectly. Pairs should mark these sentences with an “X.”
 - Explain that in the final section, Part D, pairs should review the information in Parts A-C to complete the rules for using comparative adjectives.
8. Circulate and monitor students’ progress as they complete the task, providing assistance as needed. If some pairs finish more quickly than others, direct them to use the rules they developed in Part D to correct the incorrect sentences in Part C.
9. When students are finished, lead a brief whole-class review, and confirm students developed accurate rules in Part D. Provide clarification and feedback, as needed.
10. Direct students’ attention to the two sentences on the board from the beginning of the activity. Ask students to explain why different comparative adjectives forms were used in the two example sentences (*cheaper* vs. *more modern*). Read the two sentences aloud, emphasizing the word *than* (using your voice and underlining *than* on board) in each sentence, to remind students that per the rules they found, they will use *than* after the adjective to compare two things.
11. Have student volunteers produce the comparative forms for other adjectives listed on the board during the initial brainstorming session. Provide clarification, as needed.
12. Write *good* and *bad* at the bottom of the list of adjectives. Ask students: “How many syllables does *good* have? How about *bad*? Based on the rules you discovered, what is the form for these words?” (expect: **gooder* and **badder*). Explain that the rules do not apply to these common adjectives, that they are irregular. Write *good* -> *better* and *bad*-> *worse* on board; ask students to chorally repeat the forms. Ask: “What do we know about irregular forms?” (expect: they don’t follow rules, they have to be memorized). Explain that there are a few other common irregular comparative adjectives, but for now these are the only two they have to memorize.

Notes:

Follow up activity: Put students in groups of 4-5. Tell them they are going to go shopping! Pass out copies of English advertisements you have collected from the internet for a few pairs of products (two washing machines, two TVs, two radios, two vacuum cleaners, etc.). Explain that students are going to look at all of the ads and make a decision about the product their group most wants to buy after comparing and discussing prices, warranties, qualities, and features. Everyone must agree on what to buy. Groups will then write four sentences: the first sentence should describe the product they want to buy and the other three sentences should explain why they chose to buy one item and not the other. Model an example: “I want to buy the Razor phone. The Razor phone is cooler than

the Flash phone....". When groups are finished, they should take turns presenting their decisions and reasons with one or more partner groups. Monitor student output and provide feedback, as needed, while groups share their work.

Modifying the CR task for superlative adjectives in superiority comparisons: The guidelines for when to use "the adjective + *-est*" versus "the most adjective" superlative forms are similar to those for comparative adjectives. You can create your own CR task worksheet for superlative adjectives by adding two more advertisements to each set in Part A and by modifying the associated example sentences to include superlative forms (e.g., *The Compass TV is the cheapest.*). Students can perform the same syllable-based charting process in Part B, the hypothesis testing in Part C (sentences will need to be modified to contain superlatives), and the scaffolded rule formation in part D. The scaffolded rules you supply might look like this:

Complete the rules for using superlative adjectives:

1. For one-syllable adjectives like *clear*, add the ending ___(-est)_____ to the word.
* If the one-syllable word ends in 'e' like *large*, add the ending ___(-st)_____ to the word.
2. For two-syllable adjectives that end in 'y' like *happy*, change the ending to ___(-iest)_____.
3. For other adjectives with two or more syllables like *convenient*, add the word ___(most)_____ before the adjective.
4. Use the word ___(the)_____ before the adjective when using superlative adjectives.