Comparatives and Superlatives

Here are some basic rules for spelling comparatives and superlatives:

Rule 1 - one syllable adjectives or adverbs:

Comparatives
Simply add -er
Examples:
• smart = smarter
• young = younger
• fast = faster

Superlatives
Use THE and add -est
Examples:
• smart = the smartest
• young = the youngest
• fast = the fastest

Rule 1B - One syllable adjectives with a Consonant-Vowel-Consonant (CVC) Pattern:

If the adjective has a CVC pattern, double the consonant and add -er.
Examples:
• wet = wetter
• big = bigger
• sad = sadder

If the adjective has a CVC pattern, double the consonant and add -est. Don't forget THE!
Examples:
• wet = the wettest
• big = the biggest
• sad = the saddest

Rule 2 - two syllable adjectives ending in Y

Change the Y to I and add -er.
Examples:
• pretty = prettier
• happy = happier
• busy = busier

Change the Y to I and add -est. Don't forget to use THE!
Examples:
• pretty = the prettiest
• happy = the happiest
• busy = the busiest

Rule 3 - Adjectives or adverbs with two or more syllables (not ending in Y):

Use MORE
Examples:
• famous = more famous
• interesting = more interesting
• carefully = more carefully

Use THE MOST
Examples:
• famous = the most famous
• interesting = the most interesting
• carefully = the most carefully

Use of LESS
Less and not as/not so with comparatives

We use less with longer adjectives (interesting, beautiful, complicated), but we don’t normally use less with short adjectives of one syllable (big, good, high, small). Instead we use not as ... as ..., or not so ... as ... Not as is more common than not so:

The second method was less complicated than the first one

OR

The second method was not as complicated as the first one

HOWEVER

This new laptop is not as fast as my old one.

NOT: This new laptop is less fast than my old one.) short adjective so we don’t use less

Comparative adjectives: using much, a lot, far, etc.

We can strengthen or emphasise a comparative adjective using words such as much, a lot, far, even or rather, or by using than ever after the adjective:

This food is much better than the food we had yesterday.

The town is a lot more crowded these days because of the new shopping centre.

Alex is far less intelligent than the other kids in the class.

We’ve been busier than ever at work this last month or so.

We can soften a comparative adjective using a little or a bit. A bit is less formal:

She feels a little more confident now that she’s given her first public performance.

or She feels a bit more confident ... (less formal)