

'Smellmaxxing' and 'frag heads': how the gen Z perfume boom came up roses for indie brands

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions.



1. Which of the above would be the nicest thing to smell on someone?
2. Have you (or someone you know) tried wearing different perfumes / aftershaves?
3. How do you choose which perfume(s) / aftershave(s) to wear?

2 Key words

a. Match the correct word to each definition. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

aftershave

communities

enhancing

experts

fashionable

1. people who know a lot about something _____
2. groups of people who live in the same place or share interests _____
3. making something better or stronger _____
4. something (e.g. clothes, music) that is very popular now _____
5. a liquid that smells nice that men typically put on their face after they shave _____

inspired

luxury

perfume

scent

sold out

6. a smell, especially a nice one _____
7. made someone feel a strong desire to do something creative _____
8. a liquid that smells nice that is typically worn by women _____

'Smellmaxxing' and 'frag heads': how the gen Z perfume boom came up roses for indie brands

Level 1: Elementary

9. when a shop had no more of a product to sell _____

10. something very expensive and not necessary _____

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You may have to change the form of the word.

1. He puts on _____ after he washes his face every morning.

2. The _____ talks online and gives each other ideas.

3. She is a(n) _____ at fixing cars and can fix anything.

4. Long dresses are very _____ this year.

5. The Four Seasons is a(n) _____ hotel.

6. Her partner bought her a new _____, and she wears it every day.

7. The new shoes came out on Friday and _____ by Monday.

8. When he added carrots to the sauce, it _____ the sweetness of the tomatoes.

9. She was _____ by the smell of the beach to create a perfume.

10. When he arrived, he noticed the _____ of vanilla cookies.

'Smellmaxxing' and 'frag heads': how the gen Z perfume boom came up roses for indie brands

Level 1: Elementary

The global fragrance market is bigger than ever as small makers are buoyed by PerfumeTok – and teenage boys

Alice Fisher

30 June, 2025

- 1 Last month, singer Chappell Roan made a post on Instagram. She wrote: "Will the girl I just met at the perfume store please comment the perfume you recommended? You said it smelled like lipstick." The perfume – Girl of the Year by Thin Wild Mercury – sold out very fast. Thin Wild Mercury is one of many new companies making perfume exciting for new fans.
- 2 The perfume market is larger than ever. It is still growing because of Gen Z and millennials. There are TikTok communities for perfumes such as PerfumeTok. In 2023, TikTok helped 45 per cent of social media perfume sales in the US. Young people don't wear one perfume. They prefer scent layering – wearing two or more perfumes at the same time and scent wardrobing – wearing different perfumes for different occasions.
- 3 Teenage boys are also becoming aftershave experts. On TikTok, this age group calls scent layering "smellmaxxing", which the New York Times defined as a "term for enhancing" your own smell.
- 4 In the past, people liked to wear one of the bigger, more fashionable perfumes like CK One, Le Male, Poison or Opium. But now, many young "frag heads" (perfume fans) think it is better to have a personal scent by layering perfumes. But which 16-year-olds have the money for two or three luxury perfumes?

- 5 With the perfume market growing, expensive perfumes became even more popular. But also "dupes" became very big. Dupes are copies of designer perfumes but a lot cheaper.
- 6 "Niche perfumes" are also growing. These come from smaller independent companies, not big companies like Coty or Estée Lauder. Independent companies like Le Labo or Sol de Janeiro are now very popular. Even Beyoncé used one of Le Labo's candles in her 2016 film Lemonade.
- 7 Independent companies often work with artists. For example, British company Earl of East worked with musician Bon Iver. He smelled scents without knowing their names and gave his thoughts. The company then created a special scent inspired by his album. It sold out quickly.
- 8 Another independent perfume creator is Maya Njie. She was inspired to make perfumes by looking at family photos of happier times on the beach in Gambia. One perfume, Tropica, smells of sea salt, pineapple and coconut.
- 9 So, if you dream of a perfume with the smell of pineapple and coconut, or stranger smells like lipstick or sun cream, these new perfumers are ready to make it for you.

© Guardian News and Media 2025

First published in *The Guardian*, 30/06/2025

'Smellmaxxing' and 'frag heads': how the gen Z perfume boom came up roses for indie brands

Level 1: Elementary

3 Comprehension check

a. Are these sentences True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Thin Wild Mercury is one of the oldest perfume companies in the world. T / F
2. Young people don't buy perfumes, so the perfume market is smaller now. T / F
3. Scent layering means wearing two or more perfumes at the same time. T / F
4. The New York Times explained that 'smellmaxxing' involves making your own smell stronger. T / F
5. 'Dupes' are very expensive perfumes made by big companies. T / F
6. Maya Njie got the idea for her perfume Tropica from her family photos. T / F

4 Key language

a. Categorise the examples of the comparatives from the article.

bigger	better	cheaper	happier	larger	more popular
--------	--------	---------	---------	--------	--------------

One syllable: Add <i>-er</i> .	One syllable with <i>-e</i> : Add <i>-r</i> .	One syllable with consonant vowel consonant: Double the consonant and add <i>-er</i> .	Two syllables with <i>-y</i> : Remove <i>-y</i> and add <i>-ier</i> .	Two or more syllables: Use <i>more</i> .	Irregular: Change the spelling.

b. Find three more examples of comparatives in the article and add them to the table.

'Smellmaxxing' and 'frag heads': how the gen Z perfume boom came up roses for indie brands

Level 1: Elementary

c. Complete the sentences with the comparative form of the words from the box.

big
cheap

fashionable
good

happy
popular

small
strange

1. This shop is _____ than the one on the other street. It has ten floors.
2. My house is _____ than my friend's, but it has everything I need.
3. That film is _____ than her other films. I didn't understand it!
4. Her dress looks _____ than any of the other women's clothes.
5. He seems _____ now in his new relationship. They are always laughing.
6. The new phone is _____ than the old model! Like 20 per cent lesser.
7. This singer has become _____ than ever. She has millions of fans.
8. Wow! This hotel is much _____ than the one from last summer. It's fantastic!

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- There should be different smells for men and women.
- It is better to spend money on luxury perfumes than wear cheap replicas.

6 In your own words

- a. In pairs or small groups, describe good and bad smells for a perfume.
- b. Present your ideas to the class. Use adjectives to compare the different smells.