



TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE 14: TERMITES

Hello. I'm Margot Politis. Welcome to Study English, IELTS preparation.

Today, we're going to talk about *tenses*, and different ways of making *comparisons*.

Choosing the best tense for formal writing, including your IELTS essay, is important, and so is being consistent.

We're going to start by listening to an ecologist talking about termites in tropical Australia. What verb tense does she use?

This is another species of termite that we have here in the Territory, and this species is *nesuta termes graviolis* and as you can tell, it nests in trees and their nests are nice and round around the higher branches of the tree, and then they build these little runways, what we call carton runways, that run all the way from the nest, all the way down to the base of the tree, and the idea here is the termites just use them as shelter so they're not exposed to predators and not exposed to the hot sun. So they travel down through these tunnels and that allows them to access food resources on the ground.



So here in tropical Australia, termites are actually the major decomposer insect and they also play a really important role in conditioning the soil, much like earthworms do, so they help to turn over the soil, to create new soil and to increase the porosity of the soil.

She says:

"Termites are the major decomposer insect."

"They play a really important."

"They help to turn over the soil".

She used the *simple present tense* form of verbs: 'are', 'play', and 'help'.

In IELTS writing tasks, the essay topics given are general and will require you to write about actions. The simple present tense would be the most appropriate verb form to use because you would be talking about general facts.

Dr Dawes-Gromadzki was describing general facts about termites, so she used *the simple present*. Listen again.

So here in tropical Australia, termites are actually the major decomposer insect and they also play a really important role in conditioning the soil, much like earthworms do, so they help to turn over the soil.

STUDY ENGLISH

IELTS PREPARATION

She starts using the *present tense*, and then continues with it throughout her description.

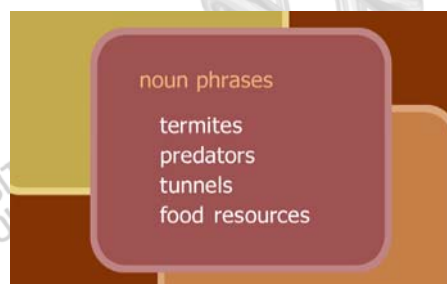
It's very important to be consistent in the verb tense you use. So when writing your IELTS essay, try to use the *simple present tense* for the main verb, and avoid switching tenses.

Keeping in mind that the essay will be about things in general, you also need to consider the language of the *noun phrases*.

Listen to Tracey talking about the nesting habits of termites. What noun forms does she use?

The idea here is the termites just use them as shelter, so they're not exposed to predators and not exposed to the hot sun. So they travel down through these tunnels and that allows them to access food resources on the ground.

Most of the *noun phrases* she uses are plural – 'termites', 'predators', 'tunnels', and 'food resources'



She uses the plural for 'termites' because she is talking about the species as a whole.

The idea here is about the habits of termites in general, so the plural would be used.

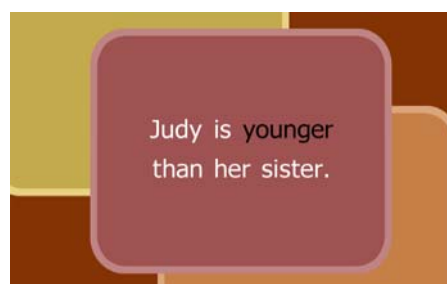
It is not only one predator or a single tunnel or one food resource that is being discussed, but all the 'predators', 'tunnels' and 'food resources' of the termites.

In formal writing, you will usually find nouns are in *plural form* when the statements are general ones about groups, classes or things.

But, of course, you'll need to watch for *uncountable nouns*, because *uncountable nouns* do not have a plural form.

The various topics you may get in the IELTS test will be general in nature, and will require you to 'discuss', 'explain', 'compare' and 'contrast' in general terms.

So for your IELTS essay, you should use the *simple present tense* as the main verb form, and use *plural nouns* or *uncountable nouns* for your subjects.



Now let's look at another aspect of the termite story – how *comparisons* are structured in English.

We use a *comparative* to compare one person, thing or action with another.

For example:

“Judy is younger than her sister.”

We can use a *double comparative* when we want to say something is changing.

For example:

“They are getting better and better since starting the IELTS program.”

There is another way we can use a *comparative* - to describe *complementary processes*. That is, we can describe how something is changing, but changing together with something else.

We can use this kind of form:

“In Australia, the ‘farther’ south you go, the ‘cooler’ the winters.”

Now watch Tracey talk about the rate at which termites break down mulch.

The more termites and the more other bugs you have in the soil, the quicker this mulch is going to decompose and that means the faster the nutrients are going to cycle through the system and help make it healthier.

She says:

“The more termites and the more other bugs you have, the quicker this mulch is going to decompose and the faster the nutrients are going to cycle.”

She is comparing several things that are changing together.

Let’s see how the basic structure of a *comparative expression* like this works.

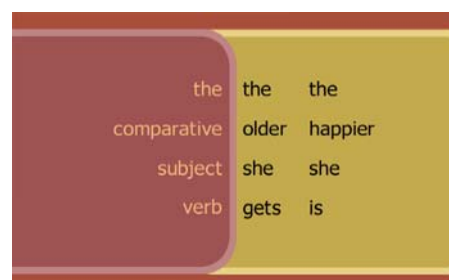
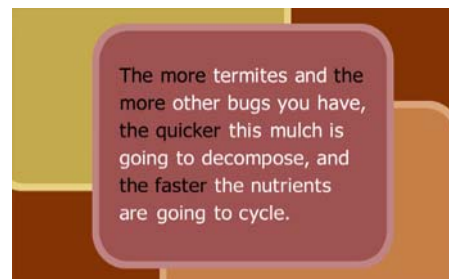
The form is:

‘the’ + comparative’ + ‘subject’ + ‘verb’.

Tracey said:

“the quicker this mulch is going to decompose”.

Then using exactly the same grammatical structure, she added the *complementary statement*.



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IELTS PREPARATION

“the faster the nutrients are going to cycle”.

Notice the symmetry of these statements? It makes it easier to remember and apply!

Let’s try another example.

“The older she gets, the happier she is.”

And another one:

“The harder I study, the more I learn.”

As with most languages, English users take shortcuts.

For example, if someone asked me how I take my tea, I might say:

“The stronger, the better!”

The stronger my tea is, the better it will be.

When the *subject* is understood in this context, you only need to state the *comparison*, leaving out the *subject* and *verb*.

“How would you like your haircut?”

“The longer, the better!”

This is short for:

The longer my hair is, the better it will be.

The short form is common with phrases ending in ‘the better’.

“When is your friend coming over?”

“The sooner, the better!”

“Do you like hot soup?”

“The hotter, the better!”

It’s also used to describe a good party – one that has lots of people. You might say:

“The more, the merrier!”

It’s understood that you mean:

“The more people there are, the merrier the party will be.”

These phrases are examples of more complex comparative structures. Why not practise them with your friends? The sooner, the better!

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That's all for today. Let's review what we've learnt.

We talked about the IELTS essay task, and using the *simple present tense* and *plural nouns*.

Then we talked about making different kinds of *comparisons*, ones that described *complementary processes*.

And don't forget that you can watch the story again and get more IELTS help when you visit our Study English website.

I'll see you next time. Bye bye.

