



Hello and welcome to Study English, IELTS Preparation. I'm Margot Politis.

Today we're going to talk about how to describe the appearance or character of animals and people.

Here's the clip. Listen to some descriptions of a very strange octopus.

You couldn't get an animal that's sort of more different or more alien to us.

They've got such a weird shape. They've got eight arms coming off their mouth. When they walk around it's like they're running round on super lips. They've got a head in the middle of their body. They've got a doughnut shaped brain. They've got three hearts, blue blood and jet propulsion, and they've got a bag on the back that they stick all the body bits in.



So octopuses have weird forms, and they have lots of really unusual behaviours as well, like high speeds and camouflaging. I think the reason that octopuses have ended up having such weird forms, and all these different sorts of behaviours is because they are a really good meal. They have no bones, no armour, no poisons and no spines. They're popular prey, so they have to be very fast and clever at squeezing through tiny holes, and really good at hiding from animals that want to eat them. So having to get away from their predators in the sea has made them evolve into amazing creatures.

So they certainly are very strange creatures. Let's begin today by talking about how we order *descriptions*.

When you write something down, you will have already thought about what you want to say.

The next step is to decide how you want to structure your description.

Today's description of an octopus starts with an interesting statement telling us how strange and unusual the octopus is compared to humans. This is to attract the attention of the reader or the listener.

Let's listen.

You couldn't get an animal that's sort of more different or more alien to us. They've got such a weird shape.

Then the description focuses on the 'appearance' of octopuses, the way they look.





They have 'a weird shape'.

Which of the octopuses' characteristics is described next?

So octopuses have weird forms, and they have lots of really unusual behaviours as well, like high speeds and camouflaging.

He talks about the 'behaviours' of the octopus.

So he begins by talking about the way an octopus looks and then he talks about its behaviours – the way it acts.

There are many other headings we could use to organise a description of something.

For example, if you want to describe a person, you might think about their 'age', 'height', 'hair', 'eyes', 'face', 'skin' or other features.

For example, how would you describe this person?

She has 'brown hair' and 'brown eyes'. Her 'face is long and narrow'.

'Her skin is tanned'.

We could also say that she is of 'average height' and has a 'slim build'. You might even want to guess how tall she is.



In Australia, we use centimetres to measure height, but many people still use feet and inches to describe height.

So we might say she is '5 feet 6 inches', or '167 centimetres' tall.

Have a look at these pictures. Which person has brown hair, blue eyes a round face and freckles?

Well, they both do.

Which person is a teenager with long, straight hair and big eyes?

Which person is middle aged with frizzy hair and glasses?





You can see that the same person can be described in different ways, depending on what you want to focus on. The more vocabulary you know, the better your descriptions will be.

Now, listen for another way of describing a person or animal.

They've got a head in the middle of their body. They've got a doughnut shaped brain. They've got three hearts, blue blood and jet propulsion.

The octopus has a 'doughnut shaped' brain.

There's not many people you could say that about!

But when describing things, it can be useful to compare something with a common shape.

So a person might have an 'oval shaped face', 'almond shaped eyes' and a 'pear shaped body', like this.



But what if you don't want to describe the way a person looks? You might want to someone's personality or character.

Let's hear more about the octopus.

They're popular prey, so they have to be very fast and clever at squeezing through tiny holes, and really good at hiding from animals that want to eat them. So having to get away from their predators in the sea has made them evolve into amazing creatures.



He describes the octopus as 'fast', 'clever', 'good at hiding', and 'amazing'.

When we are describing someone, or something, it's a good idea to make a list of headings to help organise the description.

We can talk about *intellect* – a person might be 'clever', 'wise', 'bright', 'smart', 'foolish' or even 'stupid.'

We can also talk about a person's *attitudes towards life*.

We could say a person is 'sensible', 'introverted', 'extroverted', 'optimistic' or 'pessimistic'.

Or we might talk about their *attitudes to people*. Are they 'polite', 'generous' and 'kind', or are they 'impolite', 'greedy' and 'mean'?



And we can describe someone's *behaviour* too. Are they 'positive', 'interesting' and 'confident', or are they 'negative', 'boring' and 'shy'?

When learning to describe people, it's a good idea to be familiar with opposites like these.

This will help you build your vocabulary very quickly.

Do you know the opposite of these words?

'cruel', 'extroverted', 'courteous', 'generous', 'bright'

The opposites are:

'kind', 'introverted', 'rude', 'selfish' and 'stupid'.

Sometimes, it sounds better to use one of the more positive words to describe someone.

"Mary was really cruel."

You could say: "Mary was not very kind."

"I think Kylie is rude."

"I think Kylie is not always polite."

Now let's work on building up your vocabulary about body parts.

We'll begin by listening to the clip again. Listen for words that describe the body parts of the octopus.

They've got such a weird shape. They've got eight arms coming off their mouth. When they walk around it's like they're running round on super lips. They've got a head in the middle of their body. They've got a doughnut shaped brain. They've got three hearts, blue blood and jet propulsion, and they've got a bag on the back that they stick all the body bits in.



He uses the words 'mouth', 'arms', 'lips', 'head', 'body', 'brain', 'heart', 'blood' and 'back'.

These all refer to parts of the body that you might want to describe, so it's important to know them.

The easiest way to remember large families of words like these is to have a *system*. You should organise the words by association.



For example, you could begin with the *face* and remember all the words that relate to the face – ‘eyes’, ‘mouth’, ‘nose’.

Then you could work on the *body* and all the words that go with it – ‘spine’, ‘blood’, ‘bones’.

You can then do this for the *head*, the *legs*, the *arms*.

Rhymes can also be helpful when you’re trying to remember new words.

A rhyme that Australian children learn in school is:

*Head and shoulders, knees and toes
Eyes, ears, mouth and nose.*

Or, maybe you could try to find words with similar sounds and group them together. Practicing them can also help with pronunciation.

Some good examples are:

ch-words

‘chest’, ‘chin’ and ‘cheek’.

or:

k-sounds

‘ankle’, ‘skull’, ‘back’ and ‘knuckle’.

or *words that start with h*

‘head’, ‘hip’, ‘heel’, ‘hand’, ‘heart’.

In this way, you’ll be able to practice body parts, and pronunciation at the same time. And make sure you learn the more unusual body parts as well!

And that’s all for today. Don’t forget to practice all the things we’ve learned today, and I’ll see you next time. Bye bye.

<i>face</i>	<i>body</i>
eyes	spine
mouth	blood
nose	bones