



SARAH JANE CODD
ENGLISH TEACHER • LIFE COACH

Learn English with Sarah

GRAMMAR

Built to Last: Why Some Creatures Live for Centuries

Advanced comparatives and superlatives through the science of long lives

B2

90 min

Grammar

Vocabulary

Reading

Listening

Speaking

+ ADDITIONAL LESSON INCLUDED: Vocabulary • Reading • Listening

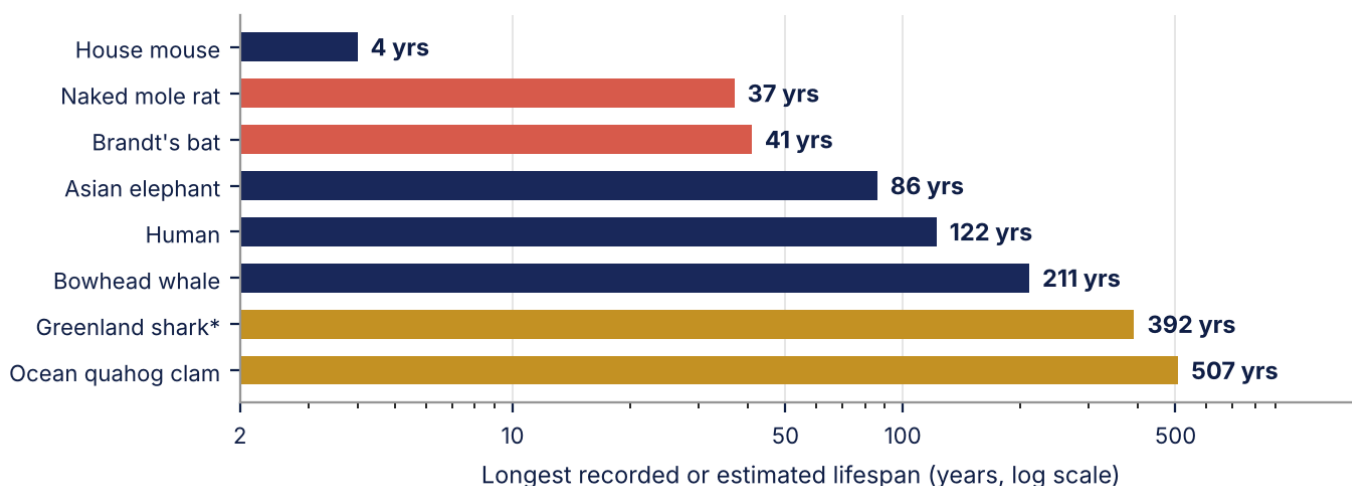
1 Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson you will be able to:

1. modify comparisons with *much*, *far*, *slightly*, *by far*, *nowhere near* and similar words
2. use *the ... the ...*, *more and more*, *twice as ... as* and *fewer / less* accurately
3. understand an article and a TED-Ed video about animal lifespans
4. compare facts and opinions precisely in discussion

2 Warm-Up

Look at the chart. Which numbers surprise you? Discuss the questions.



*Greenland shark: central scientific estimate; the true figure could be lower or higher.

1. Which creature on the chart lives the longest? Did you expect it?
2. The naked mole rat and the house mouse are a similar size. How big is the difference in their lifespans?
3. Why do you think some animals live so much longer than others?

Grammar Practice

Advanced comparatives and superlatives: modifiers, patterns and production

3 Grammar Focus

Structure	Use	Example
much / far / a lot / considerably + comparative	a big difference	Elephants live far longer than horses.
slightly / a bit / a little + comparative	a small difference	Small dogs live slightly longer than big dogs.
by far / easily + superlative	clearly the top	It is by far the oldest vertebrate.
just as / nearly as / not quite as / nowhere near as ... as	degrees of equality	A mouse lives nowhere near as long as a mole rat.
twice / three times / ten times as ... as	multiples	An elephant lives twice as long as a horse.
the + comparative, the + comparative	one change causes another	The colder the water, the slower they grow.
comparative and comparative	continuous change	More and more people live past 100.
fewer (countable) / less (uncountable)	smaller amount	fewer predators · less energy
one of the + superlative + plural noun	a member of a top group	one of the longest-lived mammals
superlative + present perfect ever	experience	the strangest animal I've ever seen

Watch out! × *very longer* → ✓ *much longer* · × *the more you sleep, more healthy* → ✓ *the more you sleep, the healthier* · Compound adjectives change the first part: *well-known* → **better-known** → **best-known**; *long-lived* → **longer-lived** → **longest-lived**.

4 Choose the Correct Option

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

- Elephants live **much / very** longer than horses.
- The Greenland shark is **by far / far** the longest-lived vertebrate we know of.
- A mouse lives **nowhere near / not near** as long as a naked mole rat.
- Today's article was **a bit / a few** easier than yesterday's.
- The **older / oldest** an animal gets, the more slowly it moves.
- Large animals usually have **fewer / less** predators than small ones.
- The naked mole rat is **one of the most / one of most** fascinating species on Earth.
- Our summers are getting **hotter and hotter / more and more hot**.

5 How Big Is the Difference?

Read the facts. Complete each sentence with a modifier from the box. Use each one once.

slightly	twice	just	nowhere near
almost	much	by far	three times

- Car A's top speed is 180 km/h. Car B's is 182 km/h. → Car B is _____ faster than Car A.
- A flat in the suburbs costs R8,000 a month; one in town costs R16,000. → The flat in town costs _____ as much.
- Tom is 1.80 m. Sam is 1.80 m. → Tom is _____ as tall as Sam.
- Everest: 8,849 m. Table Mountain: 1,085 m. → Table Mountain is _____ as high as Everest.
- You scored 80%. I scored 79%. → My score was _____ as good as yours.
- Coffee costs R30 at one café and R70 at another. → The second café is _____ more expensive.
- Tokyo has about 37 million people in its metro area; no other city comes close. → Tokyo is _____ the biggest city in the world.
- A small pizza costs R50; a large one costs R150. → The large pizza costs _____ as much as the small one.

6 The ... the ...

Join the two sentences using **the + comparative, the + comparative**.

- You practise more. Your English gets better.

- A hotel is expensive. The service is good.

- You leave late. The traffic is bad.

- We get older. We become wiser.

- A question is difficult. I enjoy it more.

- You sleep less. You feel tired.

7 Getting More and More ...

Complete the sentences with a double comparative to show continuous change.

- Houses are getting _____ (expensive).
- In autumn the days get _____ (short).
- The traffic in the city is getting _____ (bad).
- _____ (many) people are working from home.
- As we climbed, the air got _____ (cold).
- Her English is getting _____ (good).

8 Fewer, Less, Least, Fewest

Circle the correct word. Remember: **fewer/fewest** + countable, **less/least** + uncountable.

- There are **fewer / less** cars on the road on Sundays.
- I drink **fewer / less** coffee than I used to.
- This fridge uses the **least / fewest** energy of all the models.
- Our team made the **least / fewest** mistakes in the competition.
- Fewer / Less** people came than we expected.
- You should spend **fewer / less** time on your phone.

9 One Word Only

Write ONE word in each gap.

1. Elephants live _____ longer than horses.
2. The Greenland shark is _____ far the longest-lived vertebrate.
3. The _____ the water, the slower the sharks grow.
4. A mouse doesn't live nearly _____ long as a naked mole rat.
5. _____ and more people are living past 100.
6. Jeanne Calment is the oldest person who has _____ been verified.
7. There are _____ large animals than small ones on most islands.
8. Brandt's bat is one of the longest-lived mammals _____ the world.

10 Build the Sentence

Write full sentences using a superlative. Add any words you need and use the present perfect where you see ever.

1. It / good / book / I / ever / read

2. Bangkok / one of / hot / city / I / ever / visit

3. That / bad / film / we / ever / see

4. She / one of / talented / musician / in / country

5. This / by far / beautiful / place / I / ever / be

6. Monday / busy / day / of / week

11 Spot the Mistake & Rewrite

Each sentence has ONE mistake. Rewrite the sentence correctly.

1. The more you exercise, the more healthy you'll be.

2. Whales live much more longer than dolphins.

3. It's the most old tree in the country.

4. There are less species of whale than of bat.

5. She is one of the best scientist in her field.

6. My cat is twice as older as my dog.

7. This is by far the more interesting option.

8. The weather is getting more and more cold.

12 Key-Word Transformation

Complete the second sentence so it means the same as the first. Use the word in **bold** and write **3–8 words**. Do not change the word.

1. Mice don't live nearly as long as naked mole rats.

FAR

Naked mole rats _____ mice.

2. If an animal grows slowly, it usually lives longer.

SLOWER

_____ grows, the longer it usually lives.

3. No vertebrate we know of lives longer than the Greenland shark.

LONGEST-LIVED

The Greenland shark _____ we know of.

4. A horse's lifespan is about half as long as an elephant's.

TWICE

An elephant lives _____ a horse.

5. I have never read such an interesting article.

MOST

This is _____ I have ever read.

6. The number of people living past 100 keeps increasing.

MORE

_____ are living past 100.

7. Small dogs usually live a little longer than big dogs.

QUITE

Big dogs usually _____ small dogs.

8. Nothing in the study surprised scientists more than the bat's lifespan.

MOST

The bat's lifespan _____ in the study.

13 Your Turn: Speaking & Writing

Write a sentence for each prompt, then discuss your answers with your tutor.

1. Compare life in your country now with 20 years ago. Use a modifier (*far, slightly, much*).

2. Complete: *The more I ..., the ...*

3. Describe something that is getting better and better or worse and worse in your city.

4. What is by far the best decision you have ever made?

5. Compare two places you have lived or visited using *nowhere near as ... as*.

6. Name one of the most interesting people you have ever met and say why.

Vocabulary, Reading & Listening: Built to Last

Use the grammar in real English: words, an article and a TED-Ed video about why some creatures live for centuries

14 Vocabulary: Mix & Match

Match each word (1–8) with its meaning (A–H).

Set A: Core vocabulary

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 1. lifespan | A the process of growing old |
| 2. species | B the chemical processes in the body that turn food into energy |
| 3. metabolism | C long life, or the length of a life |
| 4. predator | D a group of animals or plants of the same type that can breed together |
| 5. mammal | E the length of time that a living thing lives |
| 6. reproduce | F an animal that hunts and kills other animals |
| 7. longevity | G an animal that gives birth to live young and feeds them milk |
| 8. ageing | H to produce babies or young animals |

Set B: Advanced vocabulary

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 1. outlive | A moving or working more slowly than normal |
| 2. thrive | B a hole or tunnel in the ground that an animal digs to live in |
| 3. resilient | C to live longer than someone or something |
| 4. exceptional | D a person or thing that is very different from the others in its group |
| 5. vulnerable | E to grow, develop or succeed very well |
| 6. sluggish | F much greater or better than usual |
| 7. burrow | G able to recover quickly from difficulties or damage |
| 8. outlier | H easily hurt, harmed or attacked |

15 Reading: Why Do Some Creatures Live for Centuries?

Read the article. Highlight every comparison with a modifier (e.g. *far longer*, *by far*).

- 1 A house mouse is lucky to reach its third birthday, yet a bowhead whale can live for more than 200 years. Across the animal kingdom, lifespans vary enormously – from a few weeks for a tiny laboratory worm called *C. elegans* to several centuries for some sea creatures. So why do some species age so much more slowly than others?
- 2 One general rule is that bigger animals tend to live longer. Elephants can live for 60–70 years, considerably longer than horses and far longer than rabbits. Larger animals usually have a slower metabolism, and they have fewer predators. However, the rule is far from perfect. Dogs, for example, break it completely: small breeds such as chihuahuas often live longer than giant breeds like Great Danes.
- 3 Some of the most fascinating animals are outliers. The naked mole rat, a hairless rodent about the size of a mouse, can live for more than 30 years – roughly ten times longer than a mouse. It spends almost its whole life in underground burrows, where it is much safer from predators. Bats are another surprise: Brandt's bat, which weighs only about seven grams, has been recorded living for over 40 years. Because they can fly away from danger, bats and birds generally live longer than ground mammals of a similar size.
- 4 The longest-lived vertebrate we know of is the Greenland shark. In 2016, scientists estimated that the oldest shark in their study was between 272 and 512 years old. These sharks live in freezing Arctic waters and grow extremely slowly – about one centimetre a year. It seems that the colder the water, the slower their bodies work. Even more remarkable is an ocean quahog clam nicknamed “Ming”, which turned out to be 507 years old when researchers collected it near Iceland in 2006.
- 5 Humans are among the longest-lived mammals. The oldest person whose age has been fully verified, Jeanne Calment of France, died in 1997 at the age of 122. Life expectancy has risen steadily over the past century, and more and more people are living past 100. Scientists hope that the better we understand long-lived species, the more we will learn about healthy ageing in our own.

16 Reading Comprehension

Answer the questions in full sentences.

1. How does the lifespan of a house mouse compare with that of a bowhead whale?
2. Give two reasons why larger animals usually live longer.
3. In what way do dogs break the general rule about size?
4. Why is the naked mole rat safer than many other rodents?
5. What advantage do bats and birds have over ground mammals of a similar size?
6. How old was the oldest Greenland shark in the 2016 study?
7. What link does the writer suggest between water temperature and the sharks' bodies?
8. What do scientists hope to learn by studying long-lived species?

17 Listening



Why do animals have such different lifespans? — Joao Pedro de Magalhaes

TED-Ed · 4 minutes 36 seconds

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7m8QISPP7t0>

Scan the QR code or click the link to watch.

Before you watch

1. Put these in order from the shortest to the longest lifespan: *human, bowhead whale, house mouse, laboratory worm, elephant*.
2. Predict two or three things that might make one species live longer than another.

While you watch

1. Which creature lives for only a few short weeks?
2. How long can a bowhead whale live?
3. Note down the factors the speaker says can affect how long an animal lives.
4. Write down three comparative or superlative forms you hear.

After you watch

1. Which idea from the video or the article surprised you most? Explain it to your partner using at least three different comparison structures from the Grammar Focus.

18 Vocabulary Gap Fill

Complete the sentences with words from the box. There are two extra terms you don't need.

resilient	longevity	vulnerable	reproduce	outlier
thrive	mammal	predators	outlive	sluggish

1. Tortoises are famous for their _____; some live for more than 150 years.
2. In cold weather, reptiles become _____ because their bodies can't warm up.
3. With no large _____ on the island, the birds had no reason to fly.
4. Young animals are most _____ in their first few weeks of life.
5. Rabbits _____ very quickly, so their numbers can grow fast.
6. Some oak trees _____ the people who planted them by hundreds of years.
7. Coral reefs _____ in warm, clear, shallow water.
8. With its 30-year lifespan, the naked mole rat is a real _____ among rodents.

19 Word Formation

Use the word in CAPITALS at the end of each sentence to form a word that fits the gap.

1. Scientists were amazed by the shark's _____ age. **REMARK**
2. Bats are _____ long-lived for such small animals. **SURPRISE**
3. Naked mole rats show great _____ to many diseases. **RESIST**
4. The _____ of life on Earth is incredible. **DIVERSE**
5. Life _____ in Japan is among the highest in the world. **EXPECT**
6. Without their shells, young turtles would be almost _____ against predators. **DEFEND**
7. The clam's age was an important scientific _____. **DISCOVER**
8. The _____ of the bat's life surprised the researchers. **LONG**

20 Find the Word

Find a word in the reading that matches each meaning. The paragraph number and word class are given.

1. Paragraph 1 (adverb): to a very great degree
2. Paragraph 1 (verb): to be different from each other
3. Paragraph 2 (verb): to be likely to do something; to usually do it
4. Paragraph 2 (noun, plural): types of dog (or other animal) bred by people
5. Paragraph 3 (adjective): having no hair
6. Paragraph 3 (adjective): extremely interesting
7. Paragraph 4 (verb, past simple): calculated roughly
8. Paragraph 4 (verb, past participle): given an informal name
9. Paragraph 5 (adjective, past participle): checked and proved to be true
10. Paragraph 5 (adverb): gradually and continuously

21 Discussion

Discuss these questions with your tutor or a partner.

1. Would you like to live to 120? What would be the best and worst parts of a much longer life?
2. "The longer people live, the more pressure there is on young workers." Do you agree?
3. Which do you think matters more for a long life: genes, diet or lifestyle?
4. Life expectancy is rising in many countries. Is your country's population getting older and older?
5. What is the most remarkable animal fact you have ever heard?
6. Should scientists try to slow down human ageing? Why / why not?

22 Wrap-Up

Prepare a 2-minute presentation for your tutor next lesson: "The secret of a long life."

- Compare at least three animals, people or places known for long lives.
- Use at least **six different comparison structures** from the Grammar Focus, including *the ... the ...*, a modifier (*far, slightly, by far*) and *(not) as ... as*.
- Use all sixteen vocabulary words: *lifespan, species, metabolism, predator, mammal, reproduce, longevity, ageing, outlive, thrive, resilient, exceptional, vulnerable, sluggish, burrow, outlier*.



Answer Key — Built to Last: Why Some Creatures Live for Centuries

PART A: GRAMMAR PRACTICE

Part 4 — Choose the Correct Option

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| 1. much | 5. older |
| 2. by far | 6. fewer |
| 3. nowhere near | 7. one of the most |
| 4. a bit | 8. hotter and hotter |

Part 5 — How Big Is the Difference?

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. slightly | 5. almost |
| 2. twice | 6. much |
| 3. just | 7. by far |
| 4. nowhere near | 8. three times |

Part 6 — The ... the ...

1. The more you practise, the better your English gets.
2. The more expensive the hotel, the better the service (is).
3. The later you leave, the worse the traffic is.
4. The older we get, the wiser we become.
5. The more difficult the question, the more I enjoy it.
6. The less you sleep, the more tired you feel.

Part 7 — Getting More and More ...

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. more and more expensive | 4. More and more |
| 2. shorter and shorter | 5. colder and colder |
| 3. worse and worse | 6. better and better |

Part 8 — Fewer, Less, Least, Fewest

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. fewer | 4. fewest |
| 2. less | 5. Fewer |
| 3. least | 6. less |

Part 9 — One Word Only

- | | |
|---------------|----------|
| 1. much / far | 5. More |
| 2. by | 6. ever |
| 3. colder | 7. fewer |
| 4. as | 8. in |

Part 10 — Build the Sentence

1. It's the best book I've ever read.
2. Bangkok is one of the hottest cities I've ever visited.
3. That's the worst film we've ever seen.
4. She's one of the most talented musicians in the country.
5. This is by far the most beautiful place I've ever been (to).
6. Monday is the busiest day of the week.

Part 11 — Spot the Mistake & Rewrite

1. The more you exercise, **the healthier** you'll be.
2. Whales live **much longer** than dolphins.
3. It's **the oldest** tree in the country.
4. There are **fewer** species of whale than of bat.
5. She is one of the best **scientists** in her field.
6. My cat is twice as **old** as my dog.
7. This is by far **the most interesting** option.
8. The weather is getting **colder and colder**.

Part 12 — Key-Word Transformation

1. Naked mole rats **live far longer than** mice.
2. **The slower an animal** grows, the longer it usually lives.
3. The Greenland shark **is the longest-lived vertebrate** we know of.
4. An elephant lives **about twice as long as** a horse.
5. This is **the most interesting article** I have ever read.
6. **More and more people** are living past 100.
7. Big dogs usually **don't live quite as long as** small dogs.
8. The bat's lifespan **was the most surprising result** in the study. (*was the most surprising thing/finding*)

Part 13 — Your Turn: Speaking & Writing

Answers will vary. Check modifiers (much not very + comparative), the ... the ... word order, and one of the + plural noun.

ADDITIONAL LESSON: VOCABULARY, READING & LISTENING: BUILT TO LAST

Part 14 — Vocabulary: Mix & Match

Set A: Core vocabulary

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. lifespan → E | 5. mammal → G |
| 2. species → D | 6. reproduce → H |
| 3. metabolism → B | 7. longevity → C |
| 4. predator → F | 8. ageing → A |

Set B: Advanced vocabulary

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. outlive → C | 5. vulnerable → H |
| 2. thrive → E | 6. sluggish → A |
| 3. resilient → G | 7. burrow → B |
| 4. exceptional → F | 8. outlier → D |

Part 16 — Reading Comprehension

1. A mouse rarely lives past three years, while a bowhead whale can live for more than 200 years.
2. They usually have a slower metabolism and fewer predators.
3. Small breeds (e.g. chihuahuas) often live longer than giant breeds (e.g. Great Danes).
4. It lives almost all its life in underground burrows, where it is much safer from predators.
5. They can fly away from danger, so they generally live longer.
6. Between 272 and 512 years old.
7. The colder the water, the slower their bodies seem to work (they grow about 1 cm a year).
8. More about healthy ageing in humans.

Part 17 — Listening

1. A tiny laboratory worm, *C. elegans*.
2. More than 200 years.
3. Answers may include: body size, metabolism (how fast the body works), environment (e.g. temperature), reproduction, and protection from predators/danger.
4. Answers will vary — check students' forms are accurate.

Tutor tip: watch once before the lesson to confirm the factors and examples the speaker gives.

Part 18 — Vocabulary Gap Fill

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| 1. longevity | 5. reproduce |
| 2. sluggish | 6. outlive |
| 3. predators | 7. thrive |
| 4. vulnerable | 8. outlier |

Extra words not needed: mammal, resilient

Part 19 — Word Formation

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. remarkable | 5. expectancy |
| 2. surprisingly | 6. defenceless (US: defenseless) |
| 3. resistance | 7. discovery |
| 4. diversity | 8. length |

Part 20 — Find the Word

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| 1. enormously | 6. fascinating |
| 2. vary | 7. estimated |
| 3. tend | 8. nicknamed |
| 4. breeds | 9. verified |
| 5. hairless | 10. steadily |

Part 21 — Discussion

Answers will vary. Listen for accurate comparative and superlative forms and use of the lesson vocabulary.

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