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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## 6 Minute English

### Making cities feel quieter



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

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**Neil**

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

**Georgie**

And I'm Georgie. Neil, I'm going to play you two sound recordings, and I want you to tell me how you feel when you hear them.

**Neil**

OK.

**Georgie**

First this... And now this.

**Neil**

Oh, well, that first clip made me feel really relaxed. But the second one – oh, it's horrible! I felt quite stressed out actually.

**Georgie**

Oh no! Well, this little experiment shows how much we are affected by the noise around us. And that's a problem if you're one of the four billion people around the world who live in cities.

**Neil**

Yes, whether it's the rattle of train tracks, honking car horns, or the roar of aeroplanes overhead, modern cities are full of noise and this can have serious effects. The World Health Organisation reports that by 2050, around 2.5 billion people will experience hearing loss, and exposure to loud noise has been linked to stress and anxiety.

**Georgie**

In this episode, we'll be hearing about ways to make our cities quieter, more relaxing places, using some useful new words and phrases. And remember, you'll

find all the vocabulary along with a quiz and worksheet on our website, [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com).

### Neil

But now I have a question for you, Georgie. Sound is measured in units called **decibels**. But how many **decibels** would it be if I whispered? A whisper is speaking like this. Is it:

- a) 3 **decibels**,
- b) 13 **decibels**, or
- c) 30 **decibels**?

### Georgie

Oh, that's really hard. I'll go for b) 13 **decibels**.

### Neil

Well, we'll find out the answer at the end of the programme. Let's start in one of the noisiest cities in the world – Mumbai in India, where daytime noise levels regularly hit 80 **decibels**, which is over 20 **decibels** higher than World Health Organisation recommendations. Listen to Mumbai native Chhavi Sachdev share her experiences of living in this noisy city with BBC World Service programme People Fixing the World.

### Chhavi Sachdev

I mean, India in general is just really loud. We are a loud people. We **dress loud**, we talk loud, we celebrate loud, we watch movies loud. When people ask me what I miss about living abroad, I tell them it's the quiet, because after 12 years of living in the US and Europe, when I got back, I realised I couldn't **handle** it anymore. I'd gotten used to lower levels of noise.

### Georgie

Chhavi says, "Indians talk loud, celebrate loud and **dress loud**." To **dress loud** means to wear clothes with bright colours and large, bold patterns.

### Neil

When Chhavi returned to India after living overseas, she says she couldn't **handle** the noise. If you can't **handle** something, you find it difficult to deal or cope with.

### Georgie

So, what can be done to tackle noise in cities like Mumbai? One interesting approach involves using sound itself to make things feel quieter. Soundscaping is

the idea of adding certain sounds to busy public spaces so that they sound and feel more relaxing.

### Neil

Sound artist Charles Montambault lives near the Parc des Madelinots, a busy city park in Montreal, Canada. Charles was inspired to recreate the ocean sounds he heard on holiday in the Magdalen Islands in his city park back home. On BBC World Service programme People Fixing the World, he tells reporter Natasha Fernandes that these sounds included ocean waves and some unusual-sounding sand.

### Charles Montambault

The sand on the Magdalen Islands can sing. When you walk into the sand firmly, the sand makes some **squeaky** sounds, so that's one sound that is kind of funny, kind of special.

### Natasha Fernandes

Inside the small park, surrounded by busy roads, Charles and his team set up an immersive sound **art installation** in the form of speakers planted in flower beds.

### Charles Montambault

So, the **art installation** was really to make this park a little quieter by adding some quiet noises. So, it's **counterintuitive**, but you can make a park less noisy by adding some calmer sounds.

### Georgie

The sand on the Magdalen Islands is **squeaky** – it makes a high-pitched sound called a squeak when stepped on. Charles played recordings of this sand, ocean waves and other relaxing sounds through speakers hidden in the park. He created an **art installation** – a work of art designed to give people an interactive experience.

### Neil

By adding more relaxing sounds, Charles' **art installation** actually made the park feel quieter. It's an example of something that's **counterintuitive**, meaning it happens differently from how you would expect.

### Georgie

What a great idea! And similar soundscapes are now helping city dwellers relax in other cities too, including Tokyo and Barcelona. Now Neil, you asked me a question about a very quiet sound – a whisper. So, are you going to reveal the correct answer?

**Neil**

I asked you how loud a whisper is.

**Georgie**

Yes, and I said 13 **decibels**.

**Neil**

Well, 13 is an unlucky number and you are wrong.

**Georgie**

Ah!

**Neil**

It was actually 30. OK. Let's recap the vocabulary we've learned, starting with **decibel** – the unit for measuring sound.

**Georgie**

Someone who **dresses loud** likes to wear clothes with bright colours and bold designs.

**Neil**

If you can't **handle** something, you find it difficult to deal with.

**Georgie**

An **art installation** is an artwork designed to create an interactive experience in a certain space.

**Neil**

The adjective **squeaky** describes things which make a high-pitched sound like a mouse.

**Georgie**

Squeak, squeak! And finally, if you call something **counterintuitive**, you mean it happens differently from how you would expect. Once again, our six minutes are up, but if you'd like to hear more about this and many other trending topics, you'll find more episodes and learning activities on our website, [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com). See you again soon. But for now, it's goodbye.

**Neil**

Goodbye...!

## VOCABULARY

**decibel**

unit for measuring sound

**dress loud**

wear clothes with bright colours, large patterns and bold designs

**handle (a problem)**

deal with something difficult

**art installation**

artwork designed to create an interactive experience in a specific space

**squeaky**

making a high-pitched sound

**counterintuitive**

happening differently from what you would expect