
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Life without music



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NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Rob...

Neil

... and I'm Neil. Hello.

Rob

Hello, Neil! What tune are you humming, there?

Neil

Was I humming? Oh, I woke up with it in my head. It's that song – you know (*hums some kind of pop song*)...

Rob

No idea, what you're talking about, Neil, but it's very annoying, so could you just stop it please.

Neil

But there's my problem. I can stop humming it out loud, but it keeps on repeating in my head (*more humming*). Did you know there's a name for that, Rob? When a song keeps repeating in your head?

Rob

There's a name? I don't know what it is – but I'm sure you're going to tell me.

Neil

You're right! It's an **earworm**.

Rob

Sounds nasty – is there a cure for that?

Neil

I don't think so! So let's move on. In this programme we're talking about music – and how it influences us.

Rob

But first, Neil, can you answer this question: If a person has *musical anhedonia*, does it mean they...

- a) hate music?
- b) can't enjoy music?
- or c) can't hear music?

Neil

Well, um, 'anhedonia' sounds like an illness, so I'm going to go for c) can't hear music.

Rob

We'll find out if you're wrong or right later on. But now let's listen to Professor Charles Spence telling us how music affects what we choose to eat and drink.

Charles Spence, Professor of Experimental Psychology, Oxford University

Imagine you're going to the bar and thinking about a glass of wine. There's French music playing behind the counter – more than likely you'll go for a glass of French wine. German music behind the counter – your likelihood of choosing German wine goes way, way up. If they're playing classical music you might be tempted to spend that little bit more.

Neil

What's the likelihood of you spending more, Rob?

Rob

Quite likely, actually Neil – and **likelihood** means the chance of something happening. I love a good glass of wine.

Neil

Me too. But why do we spend more when there's classical music playing?

Rob

Good question. It makes us feel a bit **classy** – that's stylish and sophisticated.

Neil

I'm guessing hip-hop doesn't have the same effect. Am I right?

Rob

You're always right, Rob. So, the professor is saying that bars and restaurants use music to **manipulate** their customers.

Neil

And that means to control or influence them. Argh! Earworms! They're messing with our minds!

Rob

I know, I know, and it doesn't stop there. Restaurants also use the **tempo** – or speed – of the music to change people's behaviour. A fast tempo gets customers in and out quickly at busy times. On the other hand, if there aren't many customers, the restaurant might want to keep people in the place for longer. So they put on music with a slow tempo to create a more relaxed atmosphere.

Neil

And **atmosphere**, in this context, means the mood or tone in a place or situation. Now music is also used to create atmosphere in films. So let's hear Debbie Wiseman talking about music in the movies.

Debbie Wiseman, Film/TV music composer

A director might come to me and say "look, can you help bring the romance to this scene with the music", and so I might write something beautifully romantic and lyrical working with what I've got and suddenly the scene will feel much more romantic, much more tender, much more sexy, whatever it needs to feel, and the music has the power to do that, to achieve that effect.

Neil

Sexy, tender, lyrical, romantic – that's emotional stuff! And **lyrical** actually means expressing strong emotions. So what's your favourite romantic moment in a film, Rob?

Rob

Oh, there are so many. I'm a sucker for romance. Once the violins start playing, I start **blubbing** – and yes, Neil – that means I have a good cry!

Neil

So sweet! Now, if you're a **sucker for something**, for example romance, it means you can't resist it. I'm more of a sucker for horror myself...

Rob

And music is **crucial** – or extremely important – in creating atmosphere in horror films.

Neil

That's very true. Music is often used to create **tension** and **suspense** – or feelings of anxiety and excitement.

Rob

Can you imagine Hitchcock's *Psycho* without that violin music? [Neil does an imitation of the violin sequence from *Psycho*]

Rob

OK, let's not have a shower scene here in the studio, Neil. You'll give me nightmares! Now,

remember at the beginning of the programme I asked you what musical anhedonia means. Is it someone who a) hates music b) can't enjoy music or c) can't hear music?

Neil

I said can't hear music...

Rob

And that's the wrong answer. It's actually b) can't enjoy music.

Neil

Not a great job for a DJ then. Anyway, Rob, before we go any further, how about those words again?

Rob

OK, the words we heard today were:

earworm
musical anhedonia
likelihood
classy
manipulate
tempo
atmosphere
lyrical
blubbing
sucker for something
crucial
tension
suspense

Neil

Well, that brings us to the end of today's 6 Minute English. Try not to catch musical anhedonia and watch out for those earworms! We hope you enjoyed humming along to today's programme. Please join us again soon.

Both

Bye.

Vocabulary

earworm

a song or tune you repeatedly hear in your head

musical anhedonia

a condition where someone can't enjoy music

likelihood

the chance that something might happen

classy

stylish and sophisticated

manipulate

control, often unfairly

tempo

speed at which a piece of music is played

atmosphere

mood or feeling in a place

lyrical

expressing emotions in a beautiful way

blubbing

crying in a loud way

sucker for something

unable to resist something

crucial

extremely important

tension

(here) nervous feeling

suspense

excited or nervous feeling when waiting for something to happen