
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Outernet

The logo for BBC Learning English, featuring the letters 'BBC' in a white box above the words 'LEARNING ENGLISH' in white text on a teal background.

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

Neil

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

Catherine

... and I'm Catherine. Hello.

Neil

Hello, Catherine! Now, how was your holiday?

Catherine

My holiday was lovely, Neil. I was staying on a beautiful island. It was very remote and there was actually no internet access. So, I did feel quite cut off actually.

Neil

And **cut off** means isolated. How did you survive, Catherine?

Catherine

Well, it wasn't easy. But I had my **e-reader** – that's an electronic device which lets you store and read lots of books from the internet. And I read a lot of Harry Potter...

Neil

Harry Potter? I know you like wizards, Catherine, but shouldn't you have downloaded some classic literature? How about Shakespeare's *The Tempest*? That's got a wizard in it too.

Catherine

Well, yes indeed. But Shakespeare on the beach isn't quite right for me, Neil.

Neil

Right. Well, today we're talking about how the poorer and more **remote** – or distant – parts of the world can get access to learning.

Catherine

That's right. But before we start, Neil, I believe you have a quiz question for us.

Neil

Yes, I do. I would like to know what the proportion of the world's population that still has no internet access is. Is it ...

- a) a quarter?
- b) half?
- or c) two thirds?

Catherine

I'm going to go for c) two thirds.

Neil

Well, we'll find out if you're right or wrong later on in the programme. So Catherine, how can these people get connected to the internet and start surfing?

Catherine

By using the Outernet.

Neil

The Outer what?

Catherine

The Outernet. That's the idea of entrepreneur Syed Karim and its goal is to give people in unconnected communities access to information without having to use expensive mobile phones or two-way satellite networks.

Neil

I see. And an **entrepreneur**, by the way, is a person who makes money by starting their own business that typically involves some financial risk.

Catherine

Yes, I've always fancied myself as a bit of an entrepreneur.

Neil

Well, you'll need money and ideas, Catherine. Have you got either of those?

Catherine

I've got ideas.

Neil

Right. OK. I get it.

Catherine

So, can you tell us how the Outernet works, Neil?

Neil

Yes, I can. The Outernet uses existing communications satellites to store and broadcast data – **broadcast** means to send out signals or programmes. Special equipment on the ground **picks up** – or receives – the data, and this can be copied to phones and computers.

Catherine

But the Outernet broadcasts data **offline** – which means it's not connected to the Internet. There's no communication with the internet for user – so, no emails, no chat forums. And that can be a big **drawback** – or disadvantage.

Neil

Yes. The Outernet doesn't provide two-way communication. But let's hear Syed Karim discussing why one-way access has some advantages. And see if you can spot another word meaning 'two-way'.

INSERT

Syed Karim, business entrepreneur

Anything that is related to bi-directional communications, the internet, to be able to provide that to the entire world, those are billion dollar projects, multi-billion dollar projects with huge time horizons and enormous complexity. And, you know, our solution that we are offering is instantaneous, I mean, it exists right now.

Neil

Did you get it? Another way of saying two-way is **bi-directional**. So what are the advantages of **one-way** communication, Catherine?

Catherine

It's significantly cheaper. Bi-directional communications are multi-billion dollar projects. But the Outernet allows poorer communities to benefit from access to information.

Neil

Yes, it does. And the other big problem is the time it would take to establish two-way access. Syed says these projects have huge **time horizons** – and this means the length of time it takes to complete a project – they're huge, so very big.

Catherine

But the Outernet is already providing access to some of the world's most valuable knowledge.

Neil

That's right. The project aims to create a library of information taken from websites including Wikipedia and Project Gutenberg, which is a collection of copyright-free e-books. **Copyright-free** means the right to use material without paying any fees.

Catherine

That sounds good. But let's go back to the internet and hear from a BBC reporter talking about another project which aims to get people connected.

INSERT

BBC reporter

Google for example is working on Project Loon, a network of high-altitude helium balloons, which will boost internet connections across much wider areas beyond coverage from conventional masts.

Neil

It's called Project **Loon** – meaning crazy – because Google thought it was such a crazy idea, and loon sounds like balloon!

Catherine

Yeah. The idea is that users will connect to the **balloon network** – or group of interconnected balloons – using an antenna attached to their building. The signal travels through the balloon network from balloon to balloon, and then to a station on the ground that's connected to the internet.

Neil

The balloons will **boost** – or increase – the number of people who will be able to access the Internet.

Catherine

Yes, it will. And that's because there will be lots of them – compared to the number of **masts** – or tall metal towers that send and receive signals – that are currently used.

Neil

OK, let's have the answer to the quiz question I asked: What proportion of the world's population still has no internet access? Is it ... a) a quarter? b) half? or c) two thirds?

Catherine

And I said c) two thirds.

Neil

And you were right! The answer is two thirds. Well done, Catherine.

Catherine

Thank you.

Neil

Now just time to listen to today's words once again. Catherine.

Catherine

OK. We heard:

e-reader

remote

entrepreneur

broadcast

picks up

drawback

bi-directional

one-way

time horizons

copyright-free

balloon network

boost

masts

Neil

Well, that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. I hope you enjoyed connecting with us today! Please join us again soon.

Both

Bye.

Vocabulary

e-reader

an electronic device which you can store and read books from the internet

remote

a long way from towns and cities

entrepreneur

a person who makes money by starting their own business that typically involves some financial risk

broadcast

send out electronic signals or programmes

picks up

receives

drawback

disadvantage

bi-directional

two-way / going in both directions

one-way

going in one direction

time horizons

the length of time it takes to complete something

copyright-free

the right to use other people's material or work without paying any fees

balloon network

group of interconnected balloons

boost

increase

masts

tall metal towers that send and receive signals