
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Buttons



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hello. This is 6 Minute English and I'm Rob.

Neil

And I'm Neil.

Rob

Today we're talking about **buttons**.

Neil

Yes, **buttons**. **Buttons** are what we have on our clothes to fasten them but the word is also used for things that we push to make things happen.

Rob

Things like your bedside alarm, radio, toaster, kettle. We press hundreds of buttons every week without thinking about it. Not everyone likes buttons though, particularly the ones we have on our clothes. It's a recognised phobia. What is this fear called? Is it

A: buttonophobia

B: koumpounophobia, or

C: coulrophobia

Any ideas Neil?

Neil

Er – I think I've got a fear of pronouncing these words! No idea what the answer is, I think buttonophobia is much too obvious – so it's one of the others – or is it? It's a hard one.

Rob

Well, I'll have the answer later in the programme. Thinking Allowed is a BBC Radio 4 programme which covers a range of interesting topics. Recently, they featured a discussion about buttons and how important they are to everyday life. Steven Connor, Professor of English at the University of Cambridge, was on the programme and he talked about the appeal of buttons. What does say about children and buttons?

Professor Steven Connor

We do love **buttons** and I think the pleasure and the **temptation** of buttons... this temptation and everyone feels it, which is why buttons have to be very **convenient**. On the other hand they have to be kept away from children, so they've got to be put high up on the wall, and buttons that really matter have to be made quite hard to push – like put behind glass or something.

Rob

OK. What does he say about children and buttons?

Neil

That they have to be kept away from them! As I said before, I loved pressing buttons as a child. I would press any that I saw, so important ones did have to be out of my reach.

Rob

Yes, he said buttons are a **temptation**. A **temptation** is something that makes you want to do something and it's often used when it's something you shouldn't really do. So buttons that lead to potentially dangerous or serious consequences, like a fire alarm, need to be protected, maybe behind glass, so **temptation** doesn't get the better of us.

Neil

But many buttons have a useful, practical purpose in everyday life, like calling a lift - so these buttons have to be easy to use without difficulty. The adjective for this is **convenient**. These everyday buttons have to be **convenient**.

Rob

Professor Connor goes on to say a bit more about why buttons are so appealing. What's his opinion?

Professor Steven Connor

You know what I think? I think it's down to the **fidgiting** instinct of very **digital** or manual creatures. I think we want to fidget with things and adjust them, we want to make them slightly better... I guess it's the **grooming** instinct in apes.

Rob

So then, why can't we resist buttons?

Neil

Because as humans we have a **fidgiting** instinct. We can't stay still for very long, we need to move around a lot because we are very **digital** creatures.

Rob

The use of **digital** though, is nothing to do with modern online technology, is it?

Neil

No, a **digit** is a finger or toe. So we are **digital** creatures – we have fingers and we like to use them.

Rob

And one thing other **digital** creatures do, creatures like apes, is **grooming**. That is they use their hands to clean the body hair of other apes. They look through the hair for insects and bugs and pull them out and eat them. But we can also use the word **grooming** for humans, someone who is well-groomed for example is neat and tidy, clean and well presented. Here's Professor Connor again.

Professor Steven Connor

You know what I think? I think it's down to the **fidgiting** instinct of very **digital** or manual creatures. I think we want to fidget with things and adjust them, we want to make them slightly better... I guess it's the **grooming** instinct in apes.

Rob

Before we wrap up, time to get the answer to this week's question. Some people have a fear of buttons, it's a recognised phobia, but what's it called? Is it

A: buttonphobia

B: koumpounophobia, or

C: coulrophobia

And Neil, you said?

Neil

I didn't, but I don't think it can be 'buttonphobia', that'd be too easy. And I think coulrophobia is a fear of clowns, so I'm going for the other one - koumpounophobia.

Rob

That it right. Buttonphobia is a made up word, and as you said, coulrophobia is a fear of clowns. Right, now let's review today's vocabulary.

Neil

We've been talking about **buttons**. These can be small round things we use to fasten our clothes, or the things that we push to make something happen.

Rob

Buttons can be a **temptation**. We see one, we want to push it. So a **temptation** is something that makes us want to do something we know we shouldn't.

Neil

And then we had the adjective **convenient**. Something that is **convenient** is easy to use without difficulty. For example the buttons to call a lift are at a very **convenient** height, they can be reached easily.

Rob

Professor Connor went on to talk about our **fidgiting** instinct. As humans we love to **fidget**, we like to keep moving around, we can't stay still for very long and we love to do stuff with our hands.

Neil

The professor talked about us being **digital** creatures, which means creatures with fingers – a **digit** is another word for a finger or toe.

Rob

And finally we had **grooming**.

Neil

This is the habit of making ourselves look nice by cleaning, washing and doing our hair. It's something some animals, such as apes, do for each other.

Rob

Well the button here in the studio is flashing, which tells me it's time to wrap up for today. Do join us next time and if you can't wait, you can always find us on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube our App and of course on our website bbclearningenglish.com. Bye for now.

Neil Bye! Can I just press that button?

Rob

Oh go on then, if you like!

VOCABULARY

buttons

small, usually round, objects we use to fasten clothes, also objects we can press to make different things happen, e.g. You press a button to call a lift

temptation

something that makes you feel like you want to do something you shouldn't, e.g. Having a big red button with the words 'Don't Press' on it, would be a big temptation, I'd just want to press it.

convenient

something that is **convenient** is easy to use without difficulty, e.g. the buttons on a lift are convenient to use.

fidgiting

not being able to stay still, always moving around to get comfortable or prevent boredom. e.g. My mum always told me to stop fidgiting in the cinema as it was disturbing the other customers.

digital

fingers and toes are **digits** – **digital** = having fingers and toes

grooming

making ourselves look nice by cleaning, washing and doing our hair, for example