
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Vocabulary



Large numbers

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Callum

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute Vocabulary with me Callum.

Finn

And me Finn. Today we're talking about large numbers.

Callum

Particularly how we say and describe them in English. Here's Anita, who's giving a talk to a tour group visiting Russia.

Finn

Listen out for the answer to this question: How many metres high is Mount Elbrus?

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Anita

Russia is a land of superlatives! At over **6,500,000** square miles, it's the largest country in the world. And the total area of cultivated land has been estimated as **a six-figure number**: perhaps 500,000 square miles. Its mountain ranges contain Mount Elbrus, which at **5,642** metres is the highest point in both Russia and Europe. Of its rivers, which are **in the hundreds of thousands**, the River Volga, the longest river in Europe, is the most well known. And what about the people? Well, here's an interesting fact: the number of languages spoken in Russia is **in triple figures** – yes, over 100!

Callum

So that was Anita. And we asked: How many metres high is Mount Elbrus?

Finn

And the answer is **five thousand, six hundred and forty-two metres** high.

Callum

Which is a good example of our topic today. When saying a large number, we always begin with the biggest number first. So thousands, then hundreds, then tens. Tens means numbers with two digits in them, like **forty-two**. Listen again.

Finn

Five thousand, six hundred and forty-two.

Callum

And the other point is, that the number labels are always singular. So **five thousand** and not five thousands.

Finn

Six hundred and not six hundreds.

Callum

Exactly. Now, notice that we don't connect thousands and hundreds with the word **and**. It's **five thousand, six hundred**.

Finn

Not five thousand and six hundred.

Callum

But we do connect hundreds and tens with the word **and**. So **six hundred and forty-two**. And I think it's time for our first clip.

INSERT CLIP 1

Russia is a land of superlatives! At over **6,500,000** square miles, it's the largest country in the world. The total area of cultivated land has been estimated as a **six-figure number**: perhaps 500,000 square miles.

Finn

So we heard **six million, five hundred thousand**. Notice that we don't connect millions to thousands with the word **and** either, or in this case, millions to hundreds of thousands. We say it like this: **six million, five hundred thousand**.

Callum

Now, how did Anita describe the figure **500,000**?

Finn

She described it as a **six-figure number**. Because it contains six digits. We could also say it's a **six-digit number**.

Callum

Yes, we sometimes describe a number in this way to emphasise how big it is. And it doesn't have to be six. It could be a **five-figure** or a **four-figure number**.

Finn

Now, on to clip 2.

INSERT CLIP 2

Of its rivers, which are **in the hundreds of thousands**, the River Volga, the longest river in Europe, is the most well known. And what about the people? Well, here's an interesting fact: the number of languages spoken in Russia is **in triple figures** – yes, over 100!

Callum

So how did Anita describe the number of rivers in Russia?

Finn

She said they're **in the hundreds of thousands**.

Callum

When we want to describe approximately what a number is, we can say it's **in the tens, the hundreds, the thousands** and so on. **Hundreds of thousands** means at least 100,000 and probably a lot more.

Finn

So you could even say that a number is **in the tens of millions**.

Callum

There was also an interesting fact there about the number of languages spoken in Russia.

Finn

Anita said they're **in triple figures**. That means that the number contains three figures – so at least 100. It's the same as saying that the number is **in the hundreds**.

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Callum

And it's quiz time! Number one: How do we say this number? 8-9-2-1. That's 8-9-2-1.

Finn

It's eight thousand, nine hundred and twenty-one.

Callum

Well done! Number two: What kind of number is 300,000? Is it:
a) a five-figure number b) a six-figure number c) a six-figures number

Finn

It's b) a six-figure number.

Callum

Correct! Number three: Listen to this number: 19,242.

Is it a) in the thousands b) in the tens of thousands c) in the hundreds of thousands?

Finn

This one is b) In the tens of thousands.

Callum

Excellent! How did you do? Very well done if you got them all right. There's more on this topic at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again for more 6 Minute Vocabulary.

Both

Bye!

Vocabulary points to take away:

When saying a large number, always begin with the largest number first and use singular number labels:

One million, two hundred thousand, four hundred and sixty-four. (1, 200,464)

Don't use the words **and** to join millions and thousands or thousands and hundreds:

Two million, fifty-six thousand, three hundred. (2,56,300)

But do use the word **and** to join hundreds and tens (tens are two-digit numbers):

Fifty-six thousand, three hundred and eleven. (56,311)

We sometimes emphasise how big a number is by describing it as **a four-figure/five-figure or six-figure number**:

I'm not sure what he earns, but it's certainly **a six-figure number**.

a six-figure salary

To describe approximately what a number is, we can say it's **in the tens/the hundreds/the thousands/the millions**. For very big numbers a number can be **(in the) tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, tens of millions** and so on:

They've cut **hundreds of thousands** of pounds from the budget.

Their assets alone must be worth **in the tens of millions**.

Another way of describing a number approximately is to say that it's **in triple figures**:

The number of emails waiting for me after my holiday was **in triple figures**.