

# BBC Learning English

## 6 Minute English

### *Scam mail*



NB: This is not a word for word transcript

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**Alice:** Hello, I'm Alice...

**Finn:** And I'm Finn.

**Alice:** And this is 6 Minute English! This week we're talking about a **crackdown** on **scam mail**.

**Finn:** **Scam mail** – that's post sent to people, asking them for money or promising them prizes like cars or holidays

**Alice:** The Metropolitan Police – the police force in London – has said that it will crack down on companies and criminal groups sending **scam mail**. It's seized thousands of letters. Do you ever get these scam mail letters Finn?

**Finn:** Yes, Alice, I do, occasionally.

**Alice:** What do they look like?

**Finn:** They're often quite convincing, they're addressed to me personally and some really look quite **official** sometimes.

**Alice:** Well, before we get into the murky world of **scam mail** – I have a question for you about the post, Finn. What was the name of the first sticky postage stamp which went on sale on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 1840? Was it:

a) The penny brown   b) The penny black or   c) The penny blue

**Finn:** I don't know much about stamps. Let me guess a, the penny brown.

**Alice:** Well, I won't tell you the answer now – we'll find out at the end of the programme. So let's hear more about **scam mail** from an investigation by the Metropolitan Police and in this report by the BBC's Phil Lavelle:

### **Insert 1: Phil Lavelle**

**It's bright, it's colourful and it tells us that a top gift is waiting, and most of us will have thrown it straight in the bin. The problem is when the more vulnerable members of society reply to these letters, especially when they look like they are official. For example, this one says, 'You must reply immediately! Do not delay!' It is a final notice, so it grabs the attention. Another one looks like it's come from a government department. In fact, it says it's from the US Department of Finance and Disclosure. So again, it looks official and it grabs attention.**

**Alice:** Phil Lavelle says that most people throw these letters straight in the bin, but the police are worried about **vulnerable** people responding to these scam letters.

**Finn:** **Vulnerable** people – the elderly, or people with learning difficulties who trust letters they get in the post.

**Alice:** The letters often have **a sense of urgency**.

**Finn:** The people who send the letters want you to act quickly – they often say things like 'Do not delay!', 'Reply immediately!' or, 'Offer ends soon'.

**Alice:** They grab attention! And Phil Lavelle says that many of the letters look **official** – in his example he has a letter which sounds like it comes from a real government department.

**Finn:** So how big is this problem Alice?

**Alice:** Police estimate that about 3.5 billion pounds is sent to postal scammers every year in the UK. They're even linking five suicides of people who got **heavily in debt** sending money in postal scams.

**Finn:** **Heavily in debt** – that means they owe a lot of money.

**Alice:** One of the problems, apparently, is if you respond once to one **scam letter** – a **tempter** letter - your details are given to other criminal groups and entered onto a **sucker** list.

**Finn:** A **sucker** list – now, a **sucker** is somebody who is easily fooled or duped.

**Alice:** Here's the BBC's Home Affairs correspondent, June Kelly:

### **Insert 2: June Kelly**

After replying to one of these so-called tempter letters a victim's name is put on what's called a suckers list, and sold to criminals all over the world. These suckers lists comprise many vulnerable people, including the elderly. They'll be bombarded with mail. Some have ended up in desperate financial straits, some with health problems.

**Alice:** June Kelly says that some people have ended up in desperate financial straits – a very bad financial situation.

**Finn:** People get **bombarded** with mail. They receive lots and lots of letters.

**Alice:** One elderly man the BBC spoke to who started responding to scam mail has sent at least £3,000 to scammers – and now receives up to 70 letters every day. The problem is that once people get hooked it's very difficult to stop. Here's Detective Superintendent Mark Ponting of the Metropolitan Police, who says even with consumer information about the risks of answering **scam mail** people continue to send money.

### **Insert 3: Detective Superintendent Mark Ponting**

I've met quite a few now, several dozen individuals who find it difficult, if not often impossible once they're hooked, to stop. So you can give them all the consumer education in the world, and actually once they're hooked they're not going to stop.

**Alice:** Well, that's all we have time for today. But before we go Finn, the answer to our question about the first sticky postage stamp. You said...

**Finn:** My sticky answer was a, the penny brown.....

**Alice:** There was a penny brown, but the first sticky postage stamp was actually the penny black.

**Finn:** A-ha, the penny black!

**Alice:** So, you don't get a prize this week, but it would still be nice if you'd read out today's words and phrases.

**Finn:** That's enough of a prize for me, Alice! What could be better? Here we go:

crackdown

scam mail

official

vulnerable

a sense of urgency

heavily in debt

tempter

sucker

bombarded

hooked

**Alice:** Thanks so much for that, Finn. We hope you'll join us next time on "6 Minute English". Bye.

**Finn:** Bye for now.

## Vocabulary and definitions

<b>crackdown</b>	strong, official action taken to punish people who break laws
<b>scam mail</b>	post sent to people with the aim of deceiving them, by offering them gifts or money which are never delivered
<b>official</b>	here, an important letter, from an organisation like a bank
<b>vulnerable</b>	people who are emotionally or physically weak, or without protection
<b>a sense of urgency</b>	a feeling that something should be dealt with as soon as possible
<b>heavily in debt</b>	owe a lot of money
<b>tempter</b>	something designed to persuade you to do something, often by offering something appealing to you
<b>sucker</b>	someone easily fooled or tricked into doing something
<b>bombarded</b>	when something happens over and over again in a short space of time
<b>hooked</b>	addicted or unable to stop doing something

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