

# BBC Learning English

## 6 Minute English

### *NASA's last shuttle flight*



NB: This is not a word for word transcript

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

**Rob:** And I'm Rob.

**Dan:** And welcome to 6 Minute English! Today we're talking about NASA's final shuttle flight.

**Rob:** NASA – the American space agency – is closing its shuttle service after 30 years. A **space shuttle** is a spaceship that's designed to make repeated journeys between earth and space. And NASA launches its final shuttle flight on 8<sup>th</sup> July.

**Dan:** It's **the end of an era** for space travel.

**Rob:** Yup, the end of an era – it's the end of a significant period of history.

**Dan:** Russia and America have been using **rockets** for space travel since the 1960s. Rockets are tube-shaped devices that use explosions to power them into the air. But NASA first started using *reusable* space shuttles in 1981. This final shuttle mission is the 135<sup>th</sup> shuttle flight. So, talking of developments in space travel, I've got this week's question for you Rob, We all know that Neil Armstrong was the first man on the Moon, but how many people in total have walked on the moon so far? Is it:

- a) 12
- b) 18
- c) 24

**Rob:** Mm, that's a good question. Erm... I'd say 18.

**Dan:** As always, we'll see if you're right at the end of the programme.

**Rob:** OK.

**Dan:** First of all, let's hear from BBC Science Correspondent, Pallab Ghosh. Here he is reporting on NASA's final shuttle flight. He says the first shuttle, Columbia, was launched into **orbit** 30 years ago, and it heralded a new era.

**Rob:** **To launch** something means to put into motion or put into action, and orbit here is the area around the Earth. So NASA launched its first shuttle into orbit 30 years ago. **To herald** something means to announce that something is about to happen – so 30 years ago, the shuttle heralded a new era for space travel.

**Dan:** Here's the BBC report on NASA's shuttle programme. What words does the reporter use to describe people's expectations of space travel? And how was this different from what actually happened?

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### **BBC NASA report**

**Announcer:** *Five... four... we've gone for main engine start; we have main engine start. Lift off of America's first space shuttle!*

**Pallab Ghosh:** Thirty years ago the first shuttle was launched into orbit.

*Announcer: And the shuttle has cleared the tower*

**Pallab Ghosh:** Columbia was to herald a new era, where space travel was cheap and commonplace. That, of course, didn't happen. Instead, it was expensive and dangerous, resulting in two shuttles being destroyed in flight.

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**Dan:** The reporter there said that with the launch of Columbia, people believed space travel would be cheap and **commonplace**, but in fact it was expensive and dangerous. What does commonplace here mean, Rob?

**Rob:** Commonplace means usual or everyday. People expected space travel to be a cheap, commonplace activity. But of course it wasn't.

**Dan:** No – space travel has always been a very expensive business. And dangerous too; two of the shuttles were destroyed in flight. The disasters killed 14 **astronauts**.

**Rob:** Astronauts are the people who are trained for space travel. So what's happening to NASA's shuttle programme now, Dan?

**Dan:** Well, nothing really – the programme is too expensive to continue; it costs around US\$ four billion a year. Around 10,000 workers have already lost their jobs in the Kennedy Space Centre in Florida, and around 5,000 more are losing their jobs at the Johnson Space Centre in Texas.

**Rob:** Wow, so a lot of people becoming unemployed with the end of the shuttle programme.

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**Dan:** Yeah, let's hear from one of the workers who was involved in the shuttle programme. Jerry Mulberry was an **engineer** for NASA, and now runs a shop selling space memorabilia.

**Rob:** So Jerry was an engineer – a person who designs and builds machines - and now he sells **memorabilia** – objects that are collected because of their historic interest.

**Dan:** Let's listen to the clip. How does Jerry feel about the end of the shuttle programme?

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**Jerry Mulberry, former NASA engineer**

**Yeah, it's kind of a sad and a happy time. You know, we've been part of this thing for a Columbia was to long time and to see the final mission... I don't know if it's really set in yet, and it probably won't until it's on its way to space.**

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**Dan:** Well, for Jerry, the final launch is both a sad and happy time; he says his feelings haven't really set in yet.

**Rob:** To set in here means to become fixed or permanent. I suppose it's sad that the programme is over, but it's also a time to celebrate the programme's achievements, don't you think that's right, Dan?

**Dan:** Well, NASA would certainly like people to remember all the achievements of the shuttle programme since it started.

**Rob:** And what does this mean for space travel now, then Dan? Does this mean no more astronauts going into space?

**Dan:** Well, NASA is hoping that private companies will be able to take astronauts into space, though that probably won't happen for several years. In the meantime, NASA will pay Russia to fly its astronauts up for them. Right Rob, well, back to today's question. I asked you how many people in total have walked on the moon so far?

**Rob:** Well, I said 18, so was I right?

**Dan:** Well, in fact you weren't; only 12 people have walked on the moon so far. Neil Armstrong was the first man on the moon in 1969 and Eugene Cernan was the last man to set foot on the moon in 1972. So it was only three years, really, that people were on the moon. Well Rob, before we go, let's hear some of the words and phrases we've used in today's programme.

**Rob:** OK, we had:

space shuttle

the end of an era

rockets

to launch

orbit

to herald

commonplace

astronaut

engineer

memorabilia

**Dan:** Thanks, Rob. I hope you've enjoyed today's programme and you'll join us again for more *6 Minute English* next time.

**Both:** Bye!

## Vocabulary and definitions

<b>space shuttle</b>	vehicle which NASA uses to make repeated journeys into space
<b>the end of an era</b>	the end of a significant or historic period of time
<b>rockets</b>	tube-shaped devices powered by huge amounts of explosive gas (used to transport people into space)
<b>to launch</b>	to propel upwards, or away from the ground
<b>orbit</b>	outside the Earth's atmosphere but still within the planet's gravity
<b>to herald</b>	to announce or anticipate something which is about to happen
<b>commonplace</b>	something that happens or is seen regularly
<b>astronaut</b>	person who travels into space on a mission
<b>engineer</b>	person who designs, builds and repairs machines
<b>memorabilia</b>	objects which are collected because they have historical significance, or are connected with a significant person, activity or organisation

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<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-13858893>

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