
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Crowds



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Sam

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Sam.

Neil

And I'm Neil.

Sam

There was a huge **crowd** of people waiting at the train station this morning, Neil. When the train finally arrived, everyone rushed in and I couldn't find a seat! I hate crowds!

Neil

But you love going to the football match on Saturday...

Sam

Ah, that's different – more like a big group of friends...

Neil

Well, whether it's sporting events, train stations or political protests, **crowds** – that's large groups of people who gather together for a shared activity, are a feature of life. For some, crowds create feelings of excitement and a sense of community, while for others they feel uncomfortable, confusing, or even dangerous. So why is that?

Sam

In this programme, we'll be discussing the role of crowds in modern life, asking why they evoke different reactions in people. And, as usual, we'll be learning some new vocabulary as well. But first, I have a question for you, Neil. The biggest crowd in history happened in 2019 when over 200 million people gathered in the northern Indian city of Allahabad. But what did so many people come together for? Was it:

- a) a cricket match
- b) a religious festival or

c) an election?

Neil

Well, I know Indians love cricket, but I doubt 200 million people would fit into a stadium! I'll guess it's c) an election.

Sam

OK, Neil. We'll find out the answer later in the programme. People gathering for a cricket match, or a music concert are usually happy events. But crowds can have a darker side as well – they can become out of control and sometimes even violent. Here's, psychologist, Professor John Drury, discussing this idea with, Anand Jagatia, presenter of the BBC World Service programme, appropriately named, CrowdScience.

John Drury

When people get together in a crowd, they **regress** psychologically, their thinking is more primitive, they become more **gullible**, and that's also associated with the supposed tendency towards violence as well.

Anand Jagatia

But according to John, the idea of **mob mentality**, that people in crowds are irrational and prone to destructive behaviour, just isn't backed up by research.

Neil

One view is that when people get together in a crowd, they become irrational. Psychologically speaking they **regress** – they return to a less advanced, more primitive way of behaving. They may also become more **gullible**, an adjective meaning easily tricked or willing to believe everything someone says.

Sam

Connected to this is the phrase **mob mentality** - the tendency of people in a group to behave in the same way as others in the group rather than as individuals. In crowds, people may do things they would never do alone, like steal or use violence.

Neil

But according to Professor Drury, in reality it's not mob mentality and violence, but rather feelings of safety and togetherness that actually characterise crowds. And according to Dr Anne Templeton, another expert on crowd psychology from the University of Edinburgh, that's especially true when you identify with the other people in a crowd. Here is Dr Templeton explaining more to BBC World Service programme, CrowdScience.

Dr Anne Templeton

The more people feel like they are part of a group with others in the crowd, the more enjoyable experience they have. There's a **correlation** between having that social identification and feeling safer. So often if we feel like we are in a group with others, we expect them to look after us. The **flip side** of that is when you don't feel as much part of the group, and you're not having a positive experience.

Neil

Dr Templeton thinks there is a **correlation** – that's a connection, or a link – between being among people who share your values, and feeling safe. Football fans cheer their team on by wearing the same colours, and singing the same songs, and this works as a kind of glue, bonding the crowd together and making them feel safe.

Sam

The disadvantage of this, however, is when you *don't* feel part of the crowd you're with. Dr Templeton calls this the **flip side** - the opposite, less good or less pleasant aspects of something.

Neil

In today's world, crowds are important because of the feeling of power they give us. It's one thing sitting alone shouting at the news on television, but it's something else altogether to march on a political protest with hundreds of demonstrators, feeling that together you could change the world. Maybe that's what everyone was doing in 2019, Sam?

Sam

Right, in my quiz question I asked you why 200 million people gathered in the Indian city of Allahabad in 2019.

Neil

I guessed it was to vote in an election. Was I right?

Sam

You were wrong, I'm afraid, Neil! In fact, the biggest crowd in history had gathered for a Hindu religious festival, the Kumbh Mela, which 220 million people attended over fifty days. OK, let's recap the vocabulary we've learned from this programme on **crowds** – large numbers of people who gather together for a shared reason.

Neil

To **regress** means return to less advanced, more primitive behaviours. **Regress** is the opposite of 'progress'.

Sam

Someone who is **gullible** is easily tricked, and will believe anything people say.

Neil

The phrase, **mob mentality** describes the tendency of people in a group to behave in ways that conform with others in the group rather than as individuals

Sam

A **correlation** is a connection or a link between two things.

Neil

And finally, the **flip side** of something means those aspects of it which are less obvious, good, or pleasant. The flip side of this programme is that, once again, our six minutes are up! Bye for now!

Sam

Bye bye!

VOCABULARY

crowd

a large group of people who gather together for a shared purpose, such as to see a music concert, or a sports event

regress

return to a less advanced, more primitive way of thinking or behaving

gullible

easily tricked or deceived; willing to believe everything other people say

mob mentality

tendency of people in a group to behave in ways that conform with others in the group rather than as individuals

correlation

a connection, relationship or link between two or more things

flip side

the opposite, less good or less pleasant aspects of something