
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Chatting to new people



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English and I'm Neil. Joining me for our discussion is Georgina.

Georgina

Hello!

Neil

Now, Georgina, you're a chatty, sociable kind of person, aren't you?

Georgina

Well, yes, I think so.

Neil

But would you go up to a stranger and strike up a conversation?

Georgina

That might be going too far – if you don't know them, what are you going to start talking about?

Neil

A good question. But maybe you should – because in this programme we're looking at how talking to strangers might actually be good for you! But first, let me talk to you about today's question. I'd like you to answer this. To make conversation we need words – so according to the Oxford English dictionary, approximately how many words are in use in the English language? Is it...

- a) 171,146
- b) 271,146
- c) 371,146

Georgina

We use a lot of words in English, but not 371,000 – so I'll go for a) 171,146.

Neil

OK. Well, as always I will reveal the answer later in the programme.

Now, let's continue our conversation about having conversations with strangers! Many of us

spend part of every day surrounded by strangers, whether on our commute to work, sitting in a park or cafe, or visiting the supermarket.

Georgina

But we rarely reach out and talk to them because we fear it would make us both feel uncomfortable – or awkward. And Gillian Sandstrom, social psychologist from Essex University in the UK, can explain why. Here she is speaking on BBC Radio 4's All In The Mind programme....

Gillian Sandstrom, Social psychologist, Essex University

We kind of **underestimate**, we have this negative voice in our head that's telling us "I shouldn't have said that, why did I do that? I said that story better last time". But the other person doesn't know any of that and they're probably... they might be **anticipating** that they won't have a positive conversation and then they do. And they think, wow, that person was amazing. So we walk round with this fear that the other person isn't going to be interested in talking to us.

Georgina

Fascinating stuff. So we have a negative voice in our head telling us about all the bad things that might happen. We basically **underestimate** ourselves.

Neil

To underestimate means to think that something is smaller or less important than it really is. We worry that what we say won't be interesting or important enough.

Georgina

Ah, but the other person doesn't know that. They're also **anticipating** – or guessing - the outcome. They're thinking that if they have a conversation, it won't go well. But of course, when strangers do talk to each other it normally goes well.

Neil

Yes, it's just fear that is stopping us. But if we get over that fear, and get chatting, people might actually like us – and we might make new friends.

Georgina

Another reason why you should **pluck up the courage** to talk to strangers is that it's good for our health!

Neil

'**Pluck up the courage**' – that's a good phrase, Georgina, meaning force yourself to do something that you're scared about and... research by the University of Chicago found we may often underestimate the positive impact of **connecting** with others for both our own and others' wellbeing.

Georgina

And **connecting** here means starting or having a good relationship with someone. So the research found that, for example, having a conversation with a stranger on your way to work may leave you both feeling happier than you would think.

Neil

Gillian Sandstrom also spoke about her research and the power of talking to strangers on the You and Yours programme. Listen out for the word 'connected'...

Gillian Sandstrom, Social psychologist, Essex University

What we've shown in the research is that it's really good for your mood. So people are in a better **mood** after they reach out and have a conversation, however minimal, and the other thing that the research has shown is that just makes people feel more **connected** to each other.

Neil

There you go! Talking to strangers is good for our **mood** – and **mood** means the way we feel. It's good for our mental health – and we might discover people actually like us! And even if we're an **introvert** – a person who prefers to be alone rather than with other people - experiments have shown that talking to others can make us happier.

Georgina

The problem remains, Neil, that when speaking to someone new, what do you talk about?

Neil

How about some interesting facts – like approximately how many words are in use in the English language? Which is what I asked you earlier. Is it?

- a) 171,146
- b) 271,146
- c) 371,146

What did you say, Georgina?

Georgina

I said 171,146. Was I right?

Neil

Spot on, Georgina. Well done! Yes, there are an estimated 171,146 words currently in use in the English language, according to the Oxford English Dictionary –plus many more obsolete words.

Georgina

I shall pick a few of them and make conversation with someone on the Tube later, but not before we recap some of the vocabulary we've explained.

Neil

Yes – so we highlighted six words, starting with **underestimate** which is to think that something is smaller or less important than it really is.

Georgina

Anticipating means guessing or expecting a certain outcome. I anticipate this programme to be 6 minutes long!

Neil

That's a given! Next, we mentioned the phrase **to pluck up the courage**, meaning to force yourself to do something that you're scared or nervous about.

Georgina

When you **connect** with someone, it means you start or have a good relationship with someone. I think we've connected on this programme, Neil!

Neil

Absolutely, Georgina. And that's put me in a good mood – **mood** means the way we feel.

Georgina

And finally, an **introvert** is a person who prefers to spend time on their own.

Neil

Thanks, Georgina. Well, that's our conversation over, but you can hear more from us on our website and on our app. Goodbye!

Georgina

Bye!

Vocabulary

underestimate

think that something is smaller or less important than it really is

anticipating

guessing or expecting a certain outcome

to pluck up (the) courage

to force yourself to do something that you're scared or nervous about

connect

start or have a good relationship with someone

mood

the way we feel

introvert

person who prefers to spend time on their own