
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Vocabulary

Contractions



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NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Finn

Hello and welcome to this episode of 6 Minute Vocabulary. I'm Finn...

Feifei

...and I'm Feifei. Hi!

Finn

Today we're going to be talking about contractions, like **I've** meaning I have, or **isn't** meaning is not. We're going to talk about what these contractions mean, and how to pronounce them.

Feifei

That's right, and learning to use contractions like **I've** or **isn't** when you're speaking will make your English sound much more fluent and natural.

Finn

And that's got to be good news. As usual, we'll have lots of examples...

Feifei

There'll be a short quiz...

Finn

And finally we'll give you a tip to help you with your vocabulary studies.

Feifei

So, let's start with an example. Listen to Bill talking about his wife and his brother.

Finn

While you're listening, try to answer this question: has Bill's brother ever visited the US?

INSERT

Bill

My wife and I live in London. **We've** been married for about five years. **I've** always lived in London, but **she's** lived in Germany, and the US, and lots of different places. **I've** never

been to the US, but my **brother's** been there many times, because his wife is from New York.

Finn

So, Feifei asked you: has Bill's brother ever visited the US?

Feifei

And the answer is yes, Bill's brother has been to the US many times, because his wife is American. She's from New York.

Finn

Did you get the answer right? Of course you did!

Feifei

Ok, now here is another question. How long have Bill and his wife been married? Listen again and check...

INSERT | CLIP |

My wife and I live in London. **We've** been married for about five years.

Feifei

You got the answer, didn't you? He said 'we've been married for about five years'.

Finn

Did you notice that he didn't say **we have been**, he said **we've been**? When we're speaking, we often shorten the word **have**, and just say **-ve** instead.

Feifei

So I have becomes **I've**, you have becomes **you've**, we have becomes **we've** and they have becomes **they've**.

Finn

We use contractions like **we've** a lot when we're speaking, but sometimes we write them, too – especially when we're writing something informal or unofficial, like an email or a postcard.

Feifei

Now, when you're writing contractions, remember to use an apostrophe. So, for example, **we've** is spelled **w – e – apostrophe – v – e**.

Finn

The apostrophe shows that a letter, or more than one, is missing.

Feifei

That's right, so when we write **we've** instead of **we have**, we miss the letters h and a from the word 'have'. And the apostrophe shows that these letters have been skipped.

Finn

Right, Here's another question about Bill. How many different places has his wife lived in? Can you remember? Here's a clip.

INSERT 1 CLIP 2

Bill

I've always lived in London, but she's lived in Germany, and the US, and lots of different places.

Feifei

He said that she's lived in lots of different places. And he mentioned two of them: Germany, and the US.

Finn

Did you notice another contraction there? Bill said **she's lived**. It's the short form of she has lived. **She's lived**.

Feifei

This is a very common one. Instead of **has**, lots of English speakers say **-'s /z/** instead.

Finn

So instead of **he has** we say **he's**, instead of **she has** it's **she's**.

Feifei

Again, when you use this **-'s /z/** contraction instead of has when you're writing, don't forget to use the apostrophe.

Finn

So, **he's** is spelled **h – e – apostrophe – s**, and **she's** is spelled **s – h – e – apostrophe – s**.

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Feifei

And now it's time for a quiz. Number one. When we're speaking, we don't normally say 'I have lived here for three years' – what do we say?

Finn

We say, 'I've lived here for three years'.

Feifei

Easy question, right?

Finn

I think so.

Feifei

Here's another one: Which pronunciation is correct? Is it a) **He's** /s/ a teacher or is it b) **He's** /z/ a teacher?

Finn

It's b) He's /z/ a teacher. And one last question. In the sentence **We've been listening to 6 Minute Vocabulary**, how do you spell **we've**?

Feifei

It's **w - e - apostrophe - v - e**.

Finn

That's it. Before we go, here's a top tip to help you learn vocabulary.

Feifei

Vocabulary learning isn't a silent activity! You'll learn words more effectively if you say them out loud. It doesn't matter if nobody's listening – say the words out loud anyway!

Finn

Absolutely. Very good. There's more about this at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again soon for more 6 Minute Vocabulary. Bye!

Feifei

Bye!

Vocabulary points to take away

Contractions with 'to be':

am becomes **-'m**:

I am here → **I'm** here

are becomes **-'re**:

you are right → **you're** right

we are talking → **we're** talking

they are colleagues → **they're** colleagues

is becomes **-'s**

He is my brother → **he's** my brother

She is my sister → **she's** my sister

It is raining → **it's** raining

Contractions with 'to have':

have becomes **-'ve**:

I have done → **I've** done

you have been → **you've** been

we have eaten → **we've** eaten

they have drunk → **they've** drunk

has becomes **-'s**:

he has met → **he's** met

she has studied → **she's** studied

it has gone → **it's** gone

my friend has arrived → **my friend's** arrived

Contractions with 'will':

will becomes **-'ll**:

I will wait for you → **I'll** wait for you

it will snow tomorrow → **it'll** snow tomorrow

they will meet us → **they'll** meet us

Contractions with 'not':

not becomes **-n't**:

we **do not** → we **don't**

he **should not** → he **shouldn't**

they **are not** → they **aren't**