
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Vocabulary

Similar words



BBC
LEARNING
ENGLISH

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

Rob

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute Vocabulary with me Rob...

Sophie

And me Sophie. And today's show is all about similar words.

Rob

Yes, similar words – words that are close in meaning, but which we use in different ways. We'll look at what they are, what they mean and how to use them.

Sophie

We're hoping for high scores in our quiz...

Rob

And we'll leave you with a big tip for learning vocabulary.

Sophie

So, first let's listen to two architects travelling up the Burj Khalifa building in Dubai.

Rob

Here's a question to think about while you listen: what's special about this building?

Sophie

What's special about this building? Let's find out.

Insert 1

Marisa

We've reached the top. How high are we?

Jon

We're on the 124th floor.

Marisa

Wow – so this is the tallest building in the world. It's pretty impressive.

Jon

You can really see how big the city is. And also what a large number of construction projects are happening here.

Marisa

So why did we come here today?

Jon

Well, I've got some big ideas about our next building project that I want to discuss!

Rob

So, Jon and Marisa are architects. And we asked you: what's special about the Burj Khalifa?

Sophie

And the answer is: it's the tallest building in the world.

Rob

And 'tall' is one of today's **similar words**.

Sophie

That's right, and 'high' is another. These words have a similar meaning – they describe something that is more than average height.

Rob

So what's the difference, Sophie?

Sophie

We usually use 'high' for things that are wider than their vertical height, for example, high mountains or a high wall. And we use 'tall' for things that are narrower than their vertical height, like people or trees.

Rob

Or buildings – as we heard just now. Buildings with many floors often have greater height than width, like the Burj Khalifa.

Sophie

That's right. But we can also talk about 'high buildings': *Sherlock Holmes fell from the top of a high building.*

Rob

Context is always important for choosing the right word. We use 'high' in this sentence because it's the position of the top of the building that's important – not the building as a whole.

Sophie

Great explanation, Sherlock. Another example?

Rob

OK. 'Big' and 'large'. These words both mean something that is more than average size. In general, we use 'big' more often than 'large' – and we use it to talk about real things, like 'big cities', and abstract things, like 'big ideas'.

Sophie

What's your big idea for today, Rob?

Rob

Well, my big idea of the day is world peace. You hear about so much death and destruction in the news I really think that world peace is what we should be aiming for.

Sophie

Well, that is a big idea – big because unfortunately it's quite an abstract idea, which is why we say big idea and not large idea. So, when do we use large?

Rob

OK, well, we use 'large' when we want to sound more formal, for example, *Dubai has the largest population in the United Arab Emirates.*

Sophie

We also use 'large' in some fixed expressions. Jon talks about Dubai having 'a large number of construction projects' in progress.

IDENT

6 Minute Vocabulary from bbclearningenglish.com.

Rob

And we're talking about similar words. Now let's hear today's words again.

Sophie

Big and large. Meaning more than average size.

Rob

'Big' for real and abstract things: *big city, big house, big decision, big ideas.* 'Large' for real things with a more formal tone: *a large population, a large number of projects, a large amount of money.*

Sophie

High and tall. Meaning more than average height.

Rob

'High' for things that are wider than their vertical height: *high mountains, high wall, high windows, high bookshelf.* 'Tall' for things that are narrower than their vertical height: *tall buildings, tall people, tall trees, tall grass, tall Sophie!*

Sophie

Thanks Rob! And remember that context is very important!

Rob

Thank you Sophie. And now it's quiz time. Is the English in these sentences right or wrong?
Number 1: *My brother is 180cm high.*

Sophie

And the answer is: Wrong. *He's 180cm tall.*

Rob

Number 2. *I looked down from the high window to the garden below.*

Sophie

And the answer is: Right. And finally, number 3. *Moving house is a large decision to make.*

Rob

And the answer is: Wrong. *It's a big decision!*

Sophie

And that brings us almost to the end of the programme.

Rob

But before we go, here's our big tip for remembering vocabulary: use internet search engines to check how often words are used together. It'll help you choose the right words!

Sophie

There's more about this at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again for more 6 Minute Vocabulary.

Both

Bye!

Vocabulary points to take away

Similar words	Definition	Example sentence
tall	more than average height	<i>Burj Khalifa is the tallest building in the world.</i>
high		<i>My brother is six foot tall.</i>
big	more than average size	<i>Sherlock Holmes fell from the top of a high building.</i>
large		<i>I put the books on a high shelf.</i>
		<i>You can see how big the city is.</i>
		<i>Moving house is a big decision.</i>
		<i>Dubai has the largest population in the United Arab Emirates.</i>
		<i>I made a large amount of money this year.</i>