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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## 6 Minute Vocabulary

### Onomatopoeia



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

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**Rob**

Hi! I'm Rob...

**Catherine**

...and I'm Catherine. Hello! Welcome to 6 Minute Vocabulary.

**Rob**

Our subject for today is onomatopoeia. That means, words that sound like the thing they mean. And Catherine and I will be trying to demonstrate some of these words today.

**Catherine**

Yes, like that sound most people's phones make when you get a text messages. We call that sound a **beep**.

**Rob**

Beep!

**Catherine**

That's it Rob, yeah. That's onomatopoeia: the word sounds like the thing it means. **Beep!**

**Rob**

**Beep beep!** Yes, have I got a message? Hold on. Right, OK. There are lots of examples of onomatopoeia in the English language, and we'll take a look at some of them on today's show.

**Catherine**

So let's start with a clip of Oliver. And he's talking about living in the city.

**Rob**

While you listen, try to answer this question: How does Oliver feel about city life?

**INSERT**

**Oliver**

It's too noisy for me! All the cars **zooming** around and **honking** their horns, music **blaring** in shops, machines **buzzing** and **bleeping**... even at night, it isn't quiet, you can

still hear the fridge **humming**, and the **rumble** of the traffic outside. Then I wish I was far away from the city, sleeping in a tent, with no sound except the **rustle** of the wind in the trees.

**Catherine**

So that's Oliver. And we asked you how he feels about city life.

**Rob**

And Oliver said it's too noisy for him.

**Catherine**

I know how he feels – London: same. Anyway, here's another question: what words did Oliver use to talk about the sounds of the city in the daytime? Listen again.

**INSERT 1 CLIP 1**

All the cars **zooming** around and **honking** their horns, music **blaring** in shops, machines **buzzing** and **bleeping**.

**Rob**

Lots of lovely vocabulary there! Oliver talked about cars **zooming** around. **Zoom**, spelt **z - o - o - m**, is a verb, which means 'to move very quickly, making a **zooming** sound'.

**Catherine**

**Zoom, zoom.**

**Rob**

Watch out!

**Catherine**

Then he mentioned the cars **honking** their horns. A **honk** – spelt **h - o - n - k** – is a short, loud sound – like a car horn makes. **Honk honk!**

**Rob**

OK, next, Oliver talked about music **blaring**. The verb to **blare**: that's **b - l - a - r - e**, means 'to make a loud, unpleasant sound' – like music that's much too loud. **Blaring!!!**

**Catherine**

You got teenage kids Rob?

**Rob**

Not yet, no.

**Catherine**

They'll be blaring their music soon enough. OK, and Oliver also mentioned machines **bleeping** and **buzzing**. Now a **bleep...**

**Rob**  
**Bleep bleep.**

**Catherine**  
That's one **b - l - double e - p** – is a short, high sound, which electronic devices make. Something like this: **Bleep, bleep, bleep.** That sounds like a heart monitor.

**Rob**  
Very good.

**Catherine**  
And a **buzz** – that's **b - u - z - z** – is a low, continuing sound, like machines and insects make.

**Rob**  
Yes. BUZZZZZZZZZZZZ...

**Catherine**  
That's it Rob.

**Rob**  
Like that, yes?

**Catherine**  
Well done. Perfect.

**Rob**  
Is there a bee in here? Now, the sounds of the city don't stop, even at night. Here's Oliver.

**INSERT 1 CLIP 2**  
...you can still hear the fridge **humming**, and the **rumble** of the traffic outside.

**Catherine**  
So he can hear the fridge **humming**. The word **hum - h - u - m** – describes a low, continuous sound. And a **hum** [HUMMMMMMMM] is different from a **buzz** [BUZZZZZZZZZ]! Can we listen to your hum and your buzz, Rob?

**Rob**  
OK, why not? Here we go. [HUMMM] and [BUZZZ].

**Catherine**  
Is that your fridge and your bee?

**Rob**  
That's right, yes, in that order.

**Catherine**

Oliver also spoke about the **rumble** of the traffic out in the street. Now, a **rumble** – **r – u – m – b – l – e** – is a bit like a **buzz**, but there's a difference – a **buzz** [BUZZZZZZZZZZ] continues without changing, but a **rumble** goes up and down, like the wheels of a truck on rough ground going **rumble, rumble, rumble, rumble, rumble**.

**Rob**

**Rumble.** You carry on **rumbling**.

**Catherine**

OK.

**Rob**

Finally, Oliver spoke about the sound of the wind in the trees. Listen out for the word he used.

### **INSERT 1 CLIP 3**

Then I wish I was far away from the city, sleeping in a tent, with no sound except the **rustle** of the wind in the trees.

**Rob**

**Rustle** describes the sound of the wind, A **rustle** is a soft, dry, moving sound. It's spelt **r – u – s – t – l – e**. And in pronunciation, the **t** is silent, so it's **rustle**. Rustle, rustle, rustle...

**Catherine**

Quite a nice sound really.

**Rob**

Thank you.

**Catherine**

Yeah.

### **IDENT**

You're listening to BBC Learning English.

**Catherine**

And our subject today is onomatopoeia – words that sound like the thing they describe. And it's time for a quiz! Question one. Rob, what sound does a car horn make?

**Rob**

Easy, it's a **honk!** Question two: what sound does a fridge make?

**Catherine**

And it's **hum**. And the last question: what sound does the wind make in the trees?

**Rob**

The correct answer is **rustle**. And that's the end of today's quiz. Well done to you at home if you got them all right.

**Catherine**

And before we go, here's an idea to help you remember new vocabulary: choose one of your favourite songs in your first language, and write some new words for it, in English.

**Rob**

Yes, and then, practise singing your song! It will help you to remember the new words.

**Catherine**

There's more about this at [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com). Join us again for more 6 Minute Vocabulary.

**Both**

Bye!

## Vocabulary points to take away

noun	example	verb	example
-	-	<b>to zoom</b>	The motorbike <b>zoomed</b> down the road.
a <b>honk</b>	I heard a <b>honk</b> , then a car came around the corner.	<b>to honk</b>	Don't <b>honk</b> at me! I'm driving safely!
-	-	<b>to blare</b>	I can't sleep because of the music <b>blaring</b> next door.
a <b>buzz</b>	There was a <b>buzz</b> of conversation in the audience.	<b>to buzz</b>	There was a mosquito <b>buzzing</b> around the room.
a <b>bleep</b>	That <b>bleep</b> means that my battery is dying.	<b>to bleep</b>	My phone <b>bleeps</b> whenever I get a text message.
a <b>hum</b>	There's a problem with my TV. It's making a loud <b>hum</b> .	<b>to hum</b>	I can hear something <b>humming</b> in the kitchen. Did you leave the dishwasher on?
a <b>rumble</b>	We saw the lightning, then we heard the <b>rumble</b> of thunder in the distance.	<b>to rumble</b>	The train <b>rumbled</b> down the track.
a <b>rustle</b>	There was a <b>rustle</b> in the bushes, then the fox appeared.	<b>to rustle</b>	He <b>rustled</b> the pages of the newspaper.