
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Vocabulary

Silent letters



BBC
LEARNING
ENGLISH

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Catherine

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute Vocabulary. I'm Catherine...

Rob

And I'm Rob. In today's show we're going to look at a very important part of spoken and written vocabulary: silent letters.

Catherine

Silent letters. We'll look at what they are, where they appear and how to say them...

Rob

There'll be a quiz...

Catherine

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

Rob

But first, let's listen to Nick. He's at the doctor's, and it's not good news.

Catherine

No, it's not. While you listen, try and answer this question: what treatment does the doctor suggest for Nick?

INSERT

Doctor

Take a seat. What seems to be the problem?

Nick

It's my wrist – it really hurts!

Doctor

Let's see if we can work out what's wrong. Do you have pain anywhere else? What about your elbows and knees?

Nick

No. They're fine. But I can't move my thumb and I don't know why.

Doctor

Well. Have you done anything physically demanding recently?

Nick

I did play tennis yesterday...

Doctor

You've probably just got a pulled muscle then. You'll just have to rest your wrist. No playing tennis for a while I'm afraid.

STING

Catherine

So, we asked you: what treatment did the doctor suggest for Nick?

Rob

And the answer is: he told Nick to rest his wrist.

Catherine

He did: well done if you got that right. Now, **wrist** – that's the bit of your body that joins your arm to your hand – is an example of the vocabulary area we're looking at today – and that's words with silent letters, Rob.

Rob

Yes: we spell this word **wrist**, **w-r-i-s-t**, but when we say it, we don't pronounce the first letter **/w/**. Instead, we start with the sound from the second letter in the word, which is the letter **r** - pronounced **/r/**.

Catherine

Let's listen to Nick again.

INSERT | CLIP |

Nick

It's my wrist – it really hurts!

Catherine

So we don't say **w-rist**: we say **wrist**. **Wrist**. Some other words that start with a silent **w** are...

Rob

Write: that's **w-r-i-t-e**, like to write a letter, and wrong, **w-r-o-n-g**, meaning not correct. In fact, there's a rule here, which is: we don't usually pronounce the **w** in words that begin **w-r**. When did you last write a letter, Catherine?

Catherine

I wrote a letter on paper... I really don't know Rob, to be honest, it's all email for me now.

Rob

That's a good idea, with your handwriting.

Catherine

Probably. Now, Nick said another word with a silent letter:

INSERT 1 CLIP 2

Nick

... but I can't move my thumb and I don't know why.

Rob

The word was **know**, meaning: to recognise and understand something, is spelt **k-n-o-w** but we don't say the letter **k**. So it isn't **k-now** but **know**.

Catherine

It's **know**. So, another rule for you: we don't normally say the **k** in words that begin **k-n**: like **knee**, the joint between your upper and lower leg, and **knife**, the tool we use to cut things. **Knee** and **knife** start with silent **k**.

Rob

Excellent. Now, Nick also said a word with a silent letter at the end.

Catherine

He did, it's a part of the hand: you've got four fingers, and then the fifth one that sticks out the other way is your **thumb**; that's **thumb** spelt **t-h-u-m-b**, but we don't pronounce the final **b**. We don't say **thum-b** – we say **thumb**. **Thumb**.

Rob

Some other words with a silent **b** at the end are...

Catherine

Climb, like to climb a ladder, and **lamb**, a baby sheep.

Rob

Do you like lamb, Catherine?

Catherine

I do like lamb! I like lambs when they are alive, I have to say, I also quite like eating them.

IDENT

6 Minute Vocabulary from BBC Learning English.

Catherine

And it's time for a quiz. Count the silent letters in these sentences. Number one. There's something **w**rong with my **w**rist.

Rob

And the answer is two. **W**rong and **w**rist both begin with a silent **w**.

Catherine

Good. Sentence number two. I don't **k**now why my **t**humb hurts.

Rob

And the answer is two again. **K**now starts with a silent **k** and **t**humb ends with a silent **b**.

Catherine

And the last one. No, I can't **c**limb up there because I've hurt my **k**nee.

Rob

Well, **c**limb has a silent **b** at the end, and **k**nee starts with a silent **k**. But the word **n**o at the beginning of the sentence is the opposite of yes, so it's spelt **n-o**. So the answer is: there are two words with silent letters in this sentence.

Catherine

Well done if you got those right.

Rob

And that brings us almost to the end of today's programme.

Catherine

Before we go, here's today's top tip for learning and recording vocabulary: when you learn a word, and you know it has a silent letter, mark the silent letter very clearly in your vocabulary notebook. That way you won't forget how to say it.

Rob

Thank you – I know what to do now! There's more about this at BBC Learning English dot com. Join us again for more 6 Minute Vocabulary.

Both

Bye!

Vocabulary points to take away

Silent letters	Words
k	know knee knife
w	wrist write wrong
b	thumb climb lamb