
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Vocabulary

Lexical sets



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

Catherine

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

Finn

And I'm Finn, hello.

Catherine

Today's programme is all about **lexical sets**.

Finn

That's right: **lexical sets** help us to learn words by grouping them together by topic or word type. So, more on that later, but first, here's Dave. He's talking about a flood that happened in his home town recently, and here's a question to answer while you listen: what happened to all of Dave's possessions?

INSERT

Dave

Well, we had so much **rain**: it said on the news we got a month's **rainfall** in just one day! The **water level** rose so high that the river **burst its banks** and **water poured** into everyone's houses. It's terrible – my house was **flooded**, all my things were completely **soaked** and the carpets are still **waterlogged**.

Catherine

Oh, dear. Dave.

Finn

Yes. We asked you what happened to Dave's possessions...

Catherine

And he said all his things were completely **soaked** – they were covered in water and now they're all wet and damaged.

Finn

Dave also used a few different words to talk about the flood and its effects. He talked about the **rain** and **rainfall** – that’s a way to describe the water that falls as rain over a period of time...

Catherine

And he talked about **water level**, that’s the height of the water in rivers and lakes. And Dave said it got very high.

Finn

It did. And that’s what caused the **floods**. Now, **floods, water level, water, rainfall** and **rain** – these are all on the topic of **rain** and **floods**.

Catherine

And they’re also all the same type of word – they’re all nouns. So we can group these words into a **lexical set**.

Finn

That’s right: a **lexical set** is a group of words which are all about the same topic, and which all belong to the same part of speech – they’re all nouns or verbs or adjectives.

Catherine

So, to make a lexical set for activities on a **beach holiday**, for example, you might think of...

Finn

...**swimming, sunbathing, and surfing**. What do you like doing on a beach holiday, Catherine?

Catherine

Me - I like sunbathing and eating ice cream. And swimming, sunbathing, eating ice cream, and surfing are all **gerunds**, that’s nouns made from –ing verbs.

Finn

Exactly, so: same topic, same word type: that’s a lexical set! Lots of people find it useful to learn words in groups like this. They seem to stick in your mind more easily.

Catherine

That’s right and by learning words in lexical sets, you’ll also have more words to choose from when you’re talking about a topic. Let’s hear Dave again and see if you can spot another lexical set:

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...my house was **flooded**, all my things were completely **soaked** and the carpets are still **waterlogged**.

Catherine

Did you get it? Dave said his house was **flooded** – full of water; all his things were **soaked** – completely wet; and his carpets still have lots of water in them – they are **waterlogged**.

Finn

The words **flooded**, **soaked** and **waterlogged** are all adjectives here, and they're all about flooding, so –

Catherine

– there's our next lexical set!

Finn

There it is!

IDENT

You're listening to BBC Learning English.

Catherine

And we're talking about lexical sets: groups of words related to the same topic that come from the same part of speech, like nouns, verbs, adjectives, gerunds.

Finn

That's right, and it's time for a quiz.

Catherine

Aha! My favourite. Right: I'll say three words and you decide if they make a lexical set or not. Finn will tell you the answers. Ready? Number one. Tea, coffee, water. Lexical set or not?

Finn

Well, they're all drinks – so the same topic – and they're all nouns, so they're a lexical set.

Catherine

They are. Another one: swimming, cleaning, sunbathing.

Finn

And that's not a lexical set. They are all gerunds, but the topic seems to be 'holiday activities' like **swimming** and **sunbathing** – and **cleaning** doesn't really fit with that group. Not on my holidays, anyway...

Catherine

Not on mine, either. So, well done if you got those right at home. And we've just got time for a quick vocabulary tip. Finn?

Finn

OK, right, here we go: find a friend, and play a game of 'lexical set tennis'. It goes like this. You choose a topic, like **sport**, and then choose a word group like **nouns** – and then you take it in turns to say words in the set. Alright Catherine: shall we try this?

Catherine

Yes, come on then...

Finn

The topic is sport and I'll start with football.

Catherine

Rugby.

Finn

Boxing.

Catherine

Basketball.

Finn

Err. Err. Oh no! There's more about this at www.bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again for more 6 Minute Vocabulary. And I've got another one.

Catherine

Come on then.

Finn

Golf...

Vocabulary points to take away

A **lexical set** is a group of words that share the same topic or theme and belong to the same part of speech – they are all nouns, all verbs, all adjectives (for example).

Lexical sets are a useful way to organise vocabulary, making it easier to learn. When reading texts from different sources, it is a good idea to try to find groups of words that are related to the same topic and that belong to the same part of speech.

Practice

Look at this short text and find the words belonging to the same lexical set (possible answers are at the bottom of the page):

The English country garden can be a beautiful place. Flowers of many different types make the garden very colourful. Green bushes and hedges often provide shelter for wildlife, and it is common to find birds like robins flying around. If there are any trees, squirrels may also visit the garden. It's also possible for foxes to find their way into the garden, especially late at night. At this time, when there are no visiting animals or birds, it can be so quiet in a country garden that you can hear the insects crawling around.

Test your memory with lexical sets

Try to find lexical sets in texts you read in English. Look through a text and pick out the words you think belong to different lexical sets and write them down on a separate piece of paper. It is a good idea to check what you have written with another person. You may have spotted different words and different lexical sets. Then hide the original text and try to remember it from your lexical set lists. If you want an even more difficult challenge, try to write your own version of the text from your lists.

Answers

There are a number of different lexical sets in this text:

- **beautiful, colourful, green** are all adjectives used to describe what the garden looks like
- **flowers, bushes, hedges, trees** are all nouns and are names of different plants in the garden
- **robins, squirrels, foxes, animals, birds, insects** are all nouns and are the names of different creatures visiting the garden