

BBC Learning English  
6 Minute English  
*Jargon Busters*



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**Yvonne:** Hello, this is '6 minute English' - I'm Yvonne Archer...

**William:** ...And I'm William Kremer. Hello!

**Yvonne:** Thanks for joining me, William! Now today, we're going to do a bit of glossing, play in few inserts and run a few ideas past you.... Anything to say to that William?

**William:** Well - why were you using so much jargon, Yvonne?

**Yvonne:** Ahh – that's because that's the topic of today's programme! So you'd better explain what it is for us.

**William:** Okay - 'jargon' is a noun that we use for specific groups of words and expressions. They're only used by people in special or technical situations because they are the only people who really understand.

**Yvonne:** So, for example, 'glossing'...

**William:** Yes – 'glossing' basically means 'explaining'. So really the only people who know what glossing means are people like you and me, people who teach English over the radio. So 'glossing' is an example of 'jargon'.

**Yvonne:** Excellent! Now before we hear more about 'jargon', I've got a question for you William. Are you ready?

**William:** No – I'm not ready but I'm feeling brave!



**Yvonne:** That's what I like to hear! Which British Prime Minister became known as 'Jack the Jargon Killer' because he wanted officials to stop using jargon? Was it

- a) Tony Blair
- b) Winston Churchill or
- c) Robert Peel

**William:** I don't know the answer to that question but I'm going to go for B – Winston Churchill because everybody knows that Winston Churchill loved the English language and he was a very great speaker so maybe he didn't like jargon.

**Yvonne:** Good answer, but we'll find out at the programme whether you're right or wrong. Okay, recently officials were asked to stop using all the jargon that was written on a list. It contained one hundred different words and expressions – all jargon that people didn't understand unless they worked with government officials, for example.

**William:** Now that sounds like an interesting list. I wonder whether I would understand any of the jargon on it?

**Yvonne:** You might, you'll have a chance to find out - however, I need you to explain some of the language we'll come across in that report today, William. First, what does 'flagged up' mean?

**William:** If you 'flag something up', you really want to draw attention to it, you want people to notice it, so you 'flag it up' – it's a phrasal verb.

**Yvonne:** And in England, what are 'councils'?

**William:** 'Councils' are a form of local government - so 'councillors' are local politicians who people vote for. And elected councillors make decisions about things like new local buildings and roads.



**Yvonne:** Lovely. Now Paul Ross and Joanne Good from BBC London's Breakfast Show looked at three pieces of jargon which they found on that list I mentioned. But do they understand any of the jargon? Try to find out...

### **PAUL ROSS**

What do these phrases mean to you: 'stakeholder engagement'? No, me neither (no). 'A multi-agency approach'? Sort of. And 'a civic amenity site'? The chances are not much – which is why they've all been flagged up as some of the worst examples of jargon used by councils and public bodies...

**Yvonne:** William, did they understand any of the jargon?

**William:** Well, no – Paul said 'sort of' which means he had an idea what it meant, but he wasn't sure.

**Yvonne:** And what about you William – do you know what 'a civic amenity site' is, for example?

**William:** Err – not really but I'm guessing it's a really useful place that's used by citizens.

**Yvonne:** And when you put it like that, it sounds absolutely lovely – but 'a civic amenity site' is jargon so it's confusing because it could be a wonderful community centre or a smelly rubbish tip. But are there times when jargon is useful? What do you think, William?

**William:** Yes, I think if you don't want other people to understand what you're saying – but then that's not very nice because it could mean that they don't get really important information. For example, people can't complain about the building of a new civic amenity site if they don't know whether it's a good or a bad thing.

**Yvonne:** True – and that's why I don't like jargon. But does Joanne agree with me?



## JOANNE GOOD

In the end, we embrace it, don't we? I mean, jargon is the vernacular, isn't it? And I love being in the know. I mean, I've been loving this morning's calls because people introduce you into their shorthand for their workplace...

**Yvonne:** So Jo believes that after a while, most of us 'embrace' jargon – we get used to it, we begin to like it and we even start using it. But does she actually like it?

**William:** Yes, she does. She says that she loves jargon because it puts her 'in the know' – she feels part of a special group of people who understand and use it.

**Yvonne:** That's right and she even calls jargon 'the vernacular'. But what does she mean by that, William?

**William:** 'Vernacular' - she means that it's almost slang – very informal language that's only used by people who do a particular type of work.

**Yvonne:** Okay, now without using informal language, William, I need the answer to today's question! Which British Prime minister became known as 'Jack the Jargon Killer' because he tried to stop officials using jargon?

**William:** I said maybe Winston Churchill.

**Yvonne:** And - you were absolutely... right!

**William:** Yeah!

**Yvonne:** Yes! He didn't like things like 'the receipt of your communication is hereby acknowledged with thanks' - which means?



**William:** Thanks for your letter!

**Yvonne:** Easier! But that's all we've got time for today on "6 Minute English" from BBC Learning English...

**W/Y:** Goodbye!